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OR,
The Buccaneers of Barrataria.

A Romance of Piracy, With Fact
for a Foundation.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE ROYAL MIDDY," "THE
HUNTED MIDSHIPMAN," "OCEAN FIRE-
FLY," "THE SEA-RAIDER,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

PIRATES IN BATTLE.

THE roar of cannon fairly shook the earth, and the clouds of sulphurous smoke hung dark and lowering over the land and river, for the scene is upon the banks of the Mississippi, below New Orleans, where the American Army under

YOUTH ADVANCED A STEP NEARER TO GENERAL JACKSON AND CLAIBORNE AND SAID IN A LOW, BUT DISTINCT VOICE: "I COME FROM LAFITTE, THE PIRATE OF THE GULF."

General Jackson, is beating back the British soldiers who are storming their walls.

A brig-of-war lies out in the river, the roar of its guns mingling with the batteries, loud thundering upon the shore, while the rattle of rifles, the cheers of brave men and the shouts of officers giving their orders, render it a scene never to be forgotten by one who stood amid the deadly carnage.

Near the river-bank was a heavy battery of four guns, and those who fought there were clad in sailor garb.

They were a wild-looking set of men, some half-hundred in number, with faces that looked daring to recklessness.

They manned their guns slowly, and with seemingly not an atom of excitement.

They aimed to kill, and after each discharge the advancing foe had brave men to mourn for.

Standing on the parapet, watching the discharge of the guns and the effect were two persons.

Their attitude was that of being wholly unconscious of danger, a defiance of death, for they stood there without protection.

One of the two was a man of tall, commanding figure, his arms folded upon his broad breast, and his pose that of one who knows no fear and was ever graceful in any position he assumed, with no effort to appear so.

His face was a study, for it was stern in the extreme, with eyes that seemed to be but slumbering flames ready to burst forth with any feeling that excited the man.

His features were strongly marked with resolution, fearlessness and intelligence, and no one could gaze into his face without at once seeing that he was a man with a history.

He was richly attired in a sea uniform, but not one that indicated his belonging to any recognized navy of the world.

His sword-hilt sparkled with diamonds, his hat was ornamented by a huge plume of deepest sable, pinned in by a pin of gold representing a pair of golden wings, and upon his fingers were several rings of rare value and great beauty.

His companion was a mere youth, scarcely over eighteen, and his appearance in face and form was also most striking.

He was also uniformed as was the other, and with equal richness, while he wore the same kind of pin, a pair of golden wings, in his hat.

His sword-hilt also sparkled with precious stones; but he wore no jewelry other than the golden wings, and seemed not quite so fond of display as was his companion, who was his elder by a score of years.

The youth was as wholly unconcerned at the danger he was in, as was his superior, and gazed upon the scene of battle with the air of one who was indifferent to death, or defiant.

His face was very handsome, his eyes large and dreamy in repose, but capable of intense power of expression when aroused.

"Our guns are doing well, Captain Lafitte," said the youth, addressing the one by whose side he stood.

"Yes, Leo, the hated Pirate Lafitte and his crew are certainly earning pardon by their work to-day; but mayhap we will be all hanged after the victory is won."

The man spoke with great bitterness of tone, while his lip curled with scorn.

"No, Captain Lafitte, I am sure that the good Governor Claiborne and General Jackson will keep their pledges made, for they are not men to break them," the youth warmly returned.

"Again repeat to me, good Leo, just what was said?"

"I entered their presence, as you know, monsieur, and when asked who I was simply said that I was the son of Lafitte the Pirate."

"This startled them, Leo."

"They were surprised, monsieur, and when I made known my errand they appeared more so.

"But they said that where they had not the power to pardon, they would accept the services of yourself and crew and then seek the clemency of the President for you and your men, and that I might tell you to have no fear of the result, as they pledged you their protection at least."

"And as you say, they will doubtless keep their pledges; but see, good Leo, the British are flying—the Americans have won the day, and the invaders have been beaten back."

And as Lafitte the Pirate spoke, the wild cheers of the American soldiers told that the battle was won, that the foe was routed.

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG OUTLAW.

SOME weeks prior to the scene in which the

pirate crew were participants at the battle of New Orleans, a brig-of-war, with no flag flying, was cruising along the Gulf coast of what is now the State of Louisiana, and heading toward an island which rose above the mainland that was seen in the distance.

The island was large, wooded heavily upon the top ridge, and had a fine harbor for small craft.

This harbor, and the approach to it, was commanded by the guns of a small fort built upon a headland, and in which were a dozen guns of heavy caliber, mounted on ship's carriages.

There was a group of seamen in the fort watching the approaching brig, and beyond the hill, sheltered from the view of those on a vessel cruising near, were a number of log-cabins, the homes of the dwellers upon the island.

In the little harbor were half a score of vessels, all armed, and ranging in size from a beautiful schooner of three hundred tons to a sloop of forty.

Then there were innumerable smaller craft, boats and skiffs both at anchor and drawn out upon the sandy shore.

As she headed in toward the island, those on the brig's deck could not see the fleet in the harbor, but yet beheld the fort, and an officer in brilliant uniform, who was pacing the deck, turned his glass upon the fortress.

After a long look, he said:

"It is best for us to be careful, my lord, for yonder fort is a strong one, and I would advise that we come to fully a league from the shore."

The one he addressed was in the uniform of a colonel of dragoons in the British Army, and the speaker wore the dress of a naval captain.

"You know best, Captain Grayson; but do you think the pirates will send out to us?" answered Lord Lennox.

"Without doubt, sir, for they must know that our vessel has not come to take their stronghold."

"Egad, sir, but I believe we could do it."

"No, no, my lord, for Lafitte is a most able commodore and handles his fleet well."

"He has a number of small craft, well armed, and manned with splendid seamen and fighters, and they would worry us to death, as a pack of hounds would pull down a lion."

"Ha! there is a flash from the fort, and it means that we are to come to or show our colors."

As Captain Grayson, of His Majesty's brig-of-war Vulture spoke, a puff of white smoke came from the hill on the island, and a solid shot buried itself in the sea only a few rods from the brig, and in a direct line with it.

"He aims well," said the nobleman,

"Yes, my lord, and I shall heed the warning of one who fires so true."

"Ho, lads, set the British colors at the peak, and run up a white flag to the fore to show that our errand is one of peace."

"Peace with a pirate," said the nobleman with a sneer.

"All's fair in love and war, 'tis said, my lord, so we have to make terms with this pirate commodore to gain our ends, for without him I doubt if we can reach New Orleans."

"True; and I only hope he will not be first bought by the Americans, Grayson."

"The highest bidder for his services, my lord, will become the purchaser. Ah! there comes another shot, and it is certainly well-aimed."

"Yes; and they seem not to respect the white flag."

"No, my lord; but then I suppose they consider the white flag is no protection to their black one."

"I will come to and send a boat ashore."

The order was at once given to lay to and lower away a boat; but ere the latter could leave the brig's side, a barge was seen coming off from the shore.

"He is sending out to communicate with us, my lord."

"I s., and sends a barge with a dozen oarsmen, a coxswain, and an officer," replied Lord Lennox, gazing at the approaching boat through his glass.

"It may be the pirate Lafitte himself."

"Oh, no, he is too cunning to be caught in a trap."

"The officer in the boat looks like a beardless boy."

The barge came swiftly on, urged by a dozen strong rowers, and there could be seen a flag of truce in the bows, while astern floated a black flag in the center of which was a pair of golden wings.

The officer in the stern-sheets was the same young man who afterward stood by the side of

Lafitte in the battle of New Orleans, and whom the chief had addressed as Leo.

He ran the barge near to the brig, and then gave the order to rest on the oars, while he waited for a hail from the British vessel.

Soon it came:

"Barge ahoy!"

"Ahoy the brig-of-war!" was the response, in a voice that rang out like a trumpet.

"What do you want with the brig?" called out Captain Grayson.

"To find out what the brig wants with Lafitte, the Gulf Pirate," was the response.

"We would communicate with the pirate."

"He has nothing in common with a king's vessel, sir, so I advise you to stand on your way once more."

"I wish first to meet the pirate chief, and if you will come on board I will give you certain information for your leader."

"I will come on board on the word of a British officer that I can depart with my crew unmolested," was the cautious reply.

"I grant it."

The barge on this pledge, at once resumed its way and ran alongside of the brig, the young officer springing on board.

"Handsome as a picture," muttered Lord Lennox at seeing the young officer, who advanced toward the quarter-deck, under charge of a midshipman, who seemed to envy him his good looks and gorgeous uniform.

He saluted both Captain Grayson and Lord Lennox with marked courtesy, and said:

"Gentlemen, any communication you may have to make to Commodore Lafitte, I will be his bearer."

"You call him commodore?" said Lord Lennox with sarcasm.

"Yes, sir, for he commands a fleet."

"A pirate fleet."

"True, but an armed one nevertheless, and which comprises vessels that the British squadrons, as well as the Americans, have in vain tried to destroy."

Lord Lennox winced at this and receiving a warning glance from Captain Grayson, remarked:

"We will not quarrel, young sir, upon the rank your chief is pleased to assume; but where is he?"

"On his flagship, sir, in the harbor, ready to sail out and meet you in battle, had you not hoisted the white flag at the fore."

"Ah!" and the two British officers exchanged looks with each other.

"We desire that you pilot this vessel into the harbor, where we can hold converse with Lafitte."

"I cannot do so, sir, for you are the foes of the Pirates of the Gulf, and, come on what errand you may, it would be hard to prevent our men from attacking you, and you know what that would mean."

"And what would it mean, young sir?"

"The capture of your brig and perhaps the hanging of her officers at the yard-arm, just as Commodore Lafitte and his men would be treated did you prove victorious."

"You are bold, sir."

"I lead a bold life, sir."

"Well, how can we communicate with Lafitte?"

"As I said, through me."

"It is not sufficient."

"Then go yourself, under my protection, sir."

"Can you protect me?" asked Lord Lennox.

"Yes, sir, for our men would hardly fear you alone, or seek to harm you."

"I have half a mind to risk it."

"It will be your only chance to meet Commodore Lafitte, sir, for he certainly will not come here."

"You have done so."

"I am not the Lafitte."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Leo Lafitte."

"Ah! a relative of the pirate chief?"

"His son."

"Indeed! If you resemble your noted father he certainly must be a splendid-looking man."

"Thank you, sir, he is," was the calm reply.

"Grayson, I will go with this young man."

"You run a big risk, my lord."

"I needs must."

"Why not let this youth bear your communication, my lord?"

"My orders from Lord Packenham were to see Lafitte in person."

"You know best, my lord; but will it not be best to have Lafitte come half-way to meet you?"

"Ah! a good idea."

"Commodore Lafitte seeks no interview with you, my lord, for I have just heard you addressed as such, and he will not come to meet you."

"If you seek him, you must go to him."

"Haughty as Lucifer," muttered Lord Lennox, and then he asked aloud, and with a touch of sarcasm:

"What rank do you hold, young sir, under Lafitte?"

"That of his aide, and ranking as lieutenant," was the modest reply.

"I will go with you, upon your pledge of protection."

"I frankly give it, sir; but I warn you that Commodore Lafitte has no business in common with you, and if you seek to make terms for his surrender he will listen to nothing, for he is a pirate, and so expects to continue to the end."

"And that end the yard-arm?"

"It may be, sir, but his victor will gain a hard-fought battle."

"I will soon be ready, Lieutenant Lafitte," and so saying Lord Lennox went into the cabin, accompanied by Captain Grayson, while the young pirate was left to the care of the brig's officers.

Ten minutes after Lord Lennox came on deck in full uniform, and entering the barge with Leo, it at once pulled toward the outlaws' isle, while the officers of the brig looked after it with ominous forebodings at the bold act of the nobleman in bearding the lion in his den.

CHAPTER III.

THE NOBLE AND THE PIRATE.

A STRANGE-LOOKING group of men met the boat, as it landed upon the beach of the little bay.

The British officer saw the fleet at anchor, armed and ready for a battle, had the brig attempted so great a task as to fight them.

The crews were on board, the black flags, with the golden wings engraven in the center, floated at the peaks, and the vessels swung by a single anchor with cable almost taut.

The rest of the craft, such as smacks, prizes and small boats were at one side of the harbor, grouped close together, and close inshore.

On the island there was quite a number of men, perhaps four-score, and they were the dwellers in the cabins that ranged along the ridge in the background.

Many of them were cripples, for they suffered from wounds received, as was evidenced by crutches, bandaged heads, and arms worn in slings, with here and there a man minus an arm or leg.

Still they were a dangerous-looking lot, and Colonel Lord Lennox of His British Majesty's Dragoons did not like the manner in which they eyed him.

But he had made the bold venture and meant to see it through.

He was glad to see that the men saluted the young officer with marked courtesy, and gave way at his command so that they could pass through the crowd; but still there were mutterings of ill-humor from some cause, which did not escape the ear of Lord Lennox, and he could guess at the reason, for the angry glances of the men were upon him.

Leading his companion up the slope, Leo Lafitte directed his steps toward a log cabin of far more extensive proportions than were the others on the island, and it was surrounded by a stockade wall, over the top of which here and there peeped a six-pounder cannon.

The cabin was the headquarters of the pirate commodore, and also the store-house for the booty the buccaneer vessels brought in.

A massive gate led into the inclosure, and at it stood a guard with musket in hand.

As the two entered Lord Lennox beheld a man reclining in a sailor's hammock under the shelter of large live-oak trees, and he was leisurely smoking a cigar while he watched the blue clouds of smoke float lazily away above his head.

At the approach of the young outlaw and the visitor the man arose, threw away his cigar and stood awaiting their coming.

It was Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, already described to the reader, as he beheld him on the battle-field below New Orleans some weeks after.

He was not now dressed in his brilliant uniform, but wore a white flannel suit with only a pair of golden wings embroidered on each side of the collar, as the indication of his rank.

His appearance was striking, and Lord Lennox felt sure that he stood in the presence of no ordinary man, and one who was the peer in manly beauty of any one he had ever met before.

"Commodore Lafitte, I desire to present to you Lord Lennox, a colonel of His British Majesty's Dragoons, who desired an interview with you," said Leo, as he approached.

Lafitte bowed with courtly grace, and motioned the officer to be seated upon one of the rustic seats beneath the trees, while he said:

"Leo, order refreshments brought, please."

Then turning to the British officer he said, and there was a shadow of sarcasm in his voice:

"I feel honored by a visit from Lord Lennox, though I am at a loss to know why a British officer should desire an interview with Lafitte, the Pirate."

"I will soon explain, Commodore Lafitte, why I have come," and Lord Lennox addressed the pirate chief by his title as given him by Leo, wishing to place no barrier in the way of successfully accomplishing the purpose of his visit.

"Let me first offer you refreshments, my lord," said Lafitte, and as a slave approached with decanters of brandy and wines, with sweet biscuit and fruit also, upon a silver salver, he poured out a glass of Madeira and continued:

"You will find this a rare old wine, sir, for it was intended for the cellars of His British Majesty, yet found its way, by the fortunes of the sea, to my island."

"I drink your health, Lord Lennox, and that of your king."

His manner was cold, yet courtly, and yet the British officer could not but feel that he spoke with something of scorn.

He drank the toast, however, ate some fruit and then lighted one of the pirate's fragrant cigars.

For some time the two talked together upon various subjects, and the British officer was feign to confess to himself that Lafitte was certainly possessed of great intelligence and was as courtly as a courtier of France.

Several times he attempted to draw Lafitte out as to his force and number of vessels; but the question was eluded cleverly, and at last Lord Lennox came to the point of his visit with the remark:

"Now, Commodore Lafitte, I will tell you why I am here."

"I await your pleasure, my lord," and Lafitte again filled the glass of his visitor, who seemed rather glad that the delicious Madeira had failed to reach the cellars of his king.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OFFER AND A REFUSAL.

"COMMODORE LAFITTE," began Lord Lennox, in a way that showed that he felt the full importance of what he had to say:

"You are aware, of course, that His British Majesty's forces are seeking to capture New Orleans?"

"I know that such is their wish, my lord."

"To do so, they are desirous of advancing upon the town from this direction, and though we have ample force, compared with that of the enemy, we yet wish to make no mistake."

"It is certainly best not to do so, my lord, for a mistake might cost you your army."

"It doubtless would, and success would give us a foothold upon the Gulf shores which the Americans could never shake off, and we are most anxious to gain this hold, and so I come to you."

"To me?" and Lafitte arched his brows.

"Yes, Commodore Lafitte, I come to ask your aid."

"A pirate's aid?"

"That can all be gotten over, sir, so that you will be no longer a pirate."

"Once a pirate, always a pirate, I fear, Lord Lennox," said Lafitte sadly.

"No, for a pardon wipes out all stains."

"A pardon?"

"Yes, so I said, Commodore Lafitte."

"One moment, my lord, and as this conversation is taking a very interesting turn, I must ask that you allow me to call my son, as a witness."

"As you please, sir," and as Lafitte walked toward the cabin the British officer muttered to himself:

"I will be successful I am sure, for he cannot refuse honor and wealth to still remain a pirate."

"Leo, this gentleman has some communications to make to me, which I would like to have you hear."

"Now, my lord, I am all attention," and Lafitte seated himself near the officer, while Leo sat not far away.

"Well, Commodore Lafitte, I will soon make known why I am here."

"To avoid all mishaps, to guard against any mistake, the commander of the British land forces, and the commodore commanding the naval support, held a council and it was agreed to ask your aid in an advance upon New Orleans."

"My aid in what way, my lord?"

"You have quite a fleet of armed vessels?"

"Yes, fifteen vessels that are armed, my lord."

"And a large force?"

"They are fully manned, my lord, and with splendid fighters as ever stood upon a deck."

"You know the secret bayous and approaches to the city from this point?"

"Perfectly."

"The approach can be made in boats."

"And by land, sir."

"Now I am empowered, and you see here that I have the official papers, sealed and signed, to offer you the rank of a captain in the British Navy, fifty thousand dollars in gold, payment for all of your vessels as prizes, and full pardon for yourself, your officers and your men."

"A munificent offer, surely, and in return for what, my lord?"

Lord Lennox felt that the sneer still lingered in the tone of the pirate, but he replied:

"For hauling down your black flag, hoisting the English ensign in its stead, and leading in the attack upon New Orleans."

"Leo, you hear?" and Lafitte turned to the youth, who simply bowed, though his face was flushed from some cause.

"A captaincy in the Royal Navy, fifty thousand in gold, full pardon for self, officers and crew, and the value of my fleet in prize-money to divide among my men."

"Am I right, my lord?"

"You are, sir."

"In return for which I am to aid you, by leading the advance upon New Orleans?"

"Yes."

"My lord, I would still be Lafitte the Pirate, in spite of the pardon, the ten thousand pounds offered I can to-day quintuple, and I would descend to a captain, when now I am a commodore commanding a fleet."

"No, my lord, I love my black flag with its golden wings too well to haul it down at the offer of even your king, and so I will still sail the seas in defiance of my foes, while you must fight your own battles unaided by Lafitte the Pirate."

"You have my answer, Lord Lennox."

The British officer's face flushed with anger, and then he turned pale.

But he knew the value of the outlaw's services and fleet too well to get angry with him, and so said:

"Commodore Lafitte, I only make you the offer I am empowered to do; but I believe the money consideration can be trebled, the rank of commodore offered you and service in His Majesty's fleets for yourself and men."

"I will go back to those I represent, report my interview and return with their ultimatum within the month, while I need not remind you that, should you refuse them, the British fleet's first blow will be at your stronghold, and the result you can readily conjecture."

Lafitte bowed, and was about to make reply, when Leo coughed, and glancing toward him he saw the youth shake his head.

He knew well that Leo gave good advice and had some reason for his act, so he replied:

"Well, Leo, what do you think of the offer made us?"

"A most generous one, sir."

"True, with half a promise of increase, and the threat of destruction if refused?"

"Perhaps, Commodore Lafitte," said Leo, who always addressed the chief by his title when on duty, or in the presence of others, "perhaps it would be well to consider the offer of Lord Lennox until his return, and then to see what better terms those he represents will give you?"

Lafitte frowned.

He did not read the youth's motive in delay, and yet he would not act against his request and replied:

"I believe you are right, Leo."

"Lord Lennox, I will hear what terms you have to offer upon your return."

"And if my superiors assent to what I hope they will, then you will decide to accept the conditions?"

"I will first hear their offer, sir, and then decide at once; but the present offer I refuse."

Lord Lennox bowed and rose.

He knew the man too well to press him further, and so, after another glass of wine, under the escort of Leo, he started toward the shore.

But, brave as he was, his face changed color

as he beheld the excited crowd gathered upon the beach, and heard the angry voices denouncing him as one who had come to betray them.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG PIRATE AT BAY.

It was with some anxiety that Lord Lennox glanced at the face of his young guide, as the two approached the excited throng of pirates.

Leo's face was wholly unmoved. He did not even seem to have observed the trouble that was brewing upon the beach.

He walked calmly along, until they had reached the crowd, when the shout went up from one.

"He is coming, lads!"

Instantly a hush fell upon all and every eye was upon the British officer.

But, Lord Lennox did not quail. He was a brave man, and would meet what danger he had to face unflinchingly.

"Stand aside, men, for we pass here," commanded Leo, firmly, for the crowd barred his way.

Then a ringleader of the dangerous gathering was forced to speak out, and he was an evil-faced Spaniard:

"No, Señor Leo, the man you protect is here to sell us, and it must not be."

"Dare you accuse your chief of treachery, you dog of a Spaniard?" cried Leo, and his hand fell upon a pistol in his belt.

"Pardon and gold for Lafitte and his son; but the yard-arm for his crew," retorted the Spaniard, and he stepped forward and placed his hand upon the shoulder of the English officer, while he cried:

"Come, lads, for with this British officer in our power, we can make terms too."

It was the last act of his life, as a bullet crashed into his brain from the pistol of Leo, the son of Lafitte.

"Now do you dare me, men?" cried the boy, his eyes flashing, as he stood with his sword in one hand: a pistol in the other, to protect the British officer from the maddened pirates.

The crowd had fallen back at the deadly and prompt act of the young pirate officer, but there were those who were still anxious to urge on the trouble, and voices on the outskirts of the throng called out:

"Hang the British dog!"

"Down with him, for he is here to sell us out."

These were dangerous words for those wild, reckless men to hear, and they pressed more closely around the young officer and the Englishman.

"Who here doubts Lafitte?" cried Leo, as he cast his flashing eyes over the crowd.

"He has gold in plenty, and life is sweet to him."

"The British fleet is coming, and he will sell us to save himself," cried a voice.

"Yes, hang the British officer."

"Hang him!"

"No terms that we don't share!"

"Terms for us all! not for Lafitte alone!"

The cries worked the crowd up to still greater fury, and Lord Lennox felt that the hour of his death had come.

Yet he determined to die bravely and his hands rested upon his sword and pistol.

That Leo could stem that wild current of hate he could not believe.

But he saw that the youth was perfectly calm, and then from Leo's lips came the startling words:

"Fools! your hands are in the lion's mouth, so beware!"

"Seal a signal from me and the guns from headquarters, and from Lafitte's schooner mow you down like grass!" and Leo pointed to the stockade fort, and the broadside of the flag-ship of the pirate fleet, and the guns of both were seen to be bearing upon them, while, as if by magic a number of men were visible at headquarters.

There, standing upon the stockade wall, his arms folded upon his broad breast, was seen Lafitte, calmly surveying the scene of mutiny upon the shore.

The men seemed cowed, though one called out:

"We have the boy here, and the officer, so they will not fire upon us, lads!"

Leo saw that this threatened more trouble and he cried:

"Hold! you know Lafitte, and that neither this officer nor myself will deter him from firing upon you, I will give the signal to prove my words."

He then called out, in a voice that was heard

both by Lafitte and those on the schooner, pronouncing the words slowly:

"Ho, the fort! If these mutineers do not disperse, fire upon them!"

"Ay, ay, Leo!" came back in the trumpet tones of Lafitte.

And the crowd, as though moved with one impulse, broke away from the path of the daring youth and his companion.

"Now, my lord, we will enter the barge," coolly said Leo.

And the British officer gave a sigh of relief, for the ordeal through which he had passed had been a severe one.

But he asked, as they walked toward the barge:

"How was it that you were prepared for them, Lieutenant Lafitte?"

"I saw that they meant to make trouble as we landed, and so ordered the headquarters' guns manned from yonder vessel lying close inshore, while I sent an order to the officer in charge of Commodore Lafitte's schooner to train his broadside upon the crowd."

"You acted well and promptly, and that Spaniard's life you quickly ended."

"Lawless men, my lord, must be handled without mercy," was the calm reply of Leo.

And half an hour after, Lord Lennox was on board the Vulture, telling his thrilling experience to Captain Grayson, and showing a very high appreciation of Lafitte and his young lieutenant.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG ENVOY.

SOME ten days after the visit of the British officer to Lafitte, bearing his tempting offers of pardon, wealth and an honorable position in the Royal Navy, in return for the aid of his fleet in the advance of the English Army upon New Orleans, two persons sat alone in an elegantly furnished mansion in the then capital of Louisiana.

Even at that early day there was a great deal of wealth and magnificence in New Orleans, and the town was certainly worth making a desperate fight to hold.

This the commander of the American Army, General Jackson, and the Governor of the then Territory, Governor Claiborne, fully realized, and strenuous efforts were being made to beat back the foe, whom it was expected would attack from some quarter, though just where no one knew other than the British commanders.

The place where the general and the Governor were seated, talking over the affairs of State, was the handsome home of the latter.

Guards were near by ready for duty, a sentinel paced to and fro in front of the massive iron gateway, and in a room, across the hall to the one in which sat the two distinguished leaders, half a dozen staff officers were chatting together.

General Jackson and Governor Claiborne were evidently impressed with the situation of affairs, and had been discussing the exact time and place of the attack of the British.

Suddenly an officer entered and said that a young man was without who begged an audience with the Governor.

"Who is he, captain?"

"I do not know, sir, for he gave no name, simply having begged to see you, and stating that his business was most important," answered the staff-officer.

"Admit him then."

A moment after a young man in sailor's garb entered, and bowed politely to the two leaders, while he said:

"You are Governor Claiborne, are you not, sir?"

"I am, my lad, and you appear to be a sailor from your dress, and a handsome one too," and he glanced at General Jackson, whose keen eyes were riveted upon the visitor.

"I thank your Excellency for the compliment. I am a sailor, sir, and have sought you to give you important information, sir."

"Indeed! and from whom do you come, my lad?"

The youth advanced a step nearer to General Jackson and Claiborne and said in a low, but distinct voice:

"I come from Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf."

Both the Governor and the general started, in spite of their nerve, and the former said eagerly:

"And does Lafitte dare send you to me with a message?"

"He has dared to do so, your Excellency, and it is one that you will see the importance of when I make it known to you, sir."

"You recall our conversation at the time this

youth was announced, general?" said the Governor.

"Yes, it was of Lafitte."

"It was indeed, and the coming of this young man but proves the truth of the saying, 'Speak of the devil and his imps will appear,'"

Lafitte laughed lightly at this, for he it was who had so boldly gone to the Governor's mansion.

"Do you know, young man, that you have placed your head in a noose in coming here, for you are doubtless one of Lafitte's men?"

"I am his son, sir, and his aide, so I know well the risk I run; but will you not hear what Commodore Lafitte desired me to make known to you?"

"Yes, and I can guess its purport."

"I hardly think so, your Excellency, for you doubtless think he begs for your clemency, but it is not so."

"What else can he send to me for?"

"To inform you, sir, that some days ago His British Majesty's brig-of-war Vulture hove-to off of his island stronghold and sent an officer ashore, one Lord Lennox, a colonel of dragoons, who was empowered by the British King's commanders to offer him certain terms if he would give the services of himself, men and vessels to England in an advance upon New Orleans."

"Ha! is this so?" said the Governor excitedly, while General Jackson asked calmly:

"And the answer of Lafitte?"

"He refused it, of course, for being an American, though an outlaw, he would not become a traitor to his native land by leading a foe against it."

"Well said, young sir, and yet he was upon our vessels at sea?"

"True, your Excellency, Commodore Lafitte is a pirate, and yet not a traitor."

"Do you know the terms of this offer?"

"Yes, sir, for I heard them."

"And they were—"

"A captain's rank in the British Navy, full pardon for himself and men, the value of his fleet in prize-money for his crew, and ten thousand pounds in gold for Lafitte."

"And the pirate refused this offer you say?"

"He did, sir."

"From some sentimental idea of patriotism, I believe you said?"

"Yes, sir, from the same sentimental idea which prompted him to send me to you to offer his own services, and those of his crew, to aid us in defending New Orleans against the British."

"Ah!" said the Governor, while General Jackson remarked:

"He wants the same terms from us?"

"No, General Jackson, he asks for no terms from you, but only hopes that you will give to him, and those who serve with him against the British, a full pardon for acts committed upon the high seas against the American flag."

Both the Governor and general were impressed by the words of Lafitte's son.

They saw that he was no ordinary personage, and his manner, though courtly and respectful, was by no means that of a supplicant.

He certainly made a good impression upon the two leaders, and more, they were deeply interested in the communication from Lafitte, as they had already planned to send a naval expedition against his stronghold to destroy it, fearing that he would take sides with the British, and well knowing his power to do great harm to the Americans did he do so.

But neither of the two officers could understand how Lafitte, a pirate, could refuse such a tempting offer as the British had made him, and then seek to serve the United States without asking equally as good terms for his services.

It caused them to be a little suspicious of Lafitte, and they determined to discover from the young envoy if there was a double intention in the offer of the Gulf scourge, whether treachery to the Americans, or real honesty of purpose to serve them.

CHAPTER VII.

OFFERED AS A SACRIFICE.

It pained Leo to see what was in the minds of the two American officers, for he understood their thoughts intuitively, and saw the suspicion resting there.

After a few words together in a low tone, the general and the Governor again turned to the youth, and the latter said somewhat sternly:

"After years of piracy, and destroying hundreds of American vessels, this man, Lafitte, from whom you come, sends us an offer of his services to fight the British."

"You tell us that he has received and refused

a most generous offer from the British commander, and without asking reward from us, seeks to serve us.

"Now, my lad, if we doubt the sincerity of the man whom you say is your father, do you think it strange?"

"No, your Excellency, for you do not know Lafitte. Did you know him, you would not doubt him. Circumstances that were beyond his control literally drew him to piracy, and he has lived in the excitement of his life of outlawry ever since; but, he is an American, and when he can palliate his crimes against his Government by aiding in the defense of his country against a powerful foe, he is willing to do so."

"He has refused to aid the British, but to gain time, that he might communicate with you, and let you know that the advance he believed would be by way of Barrataria, he led the English officer to believe that he might accept a larger sum of money and the rank of commodore."

"Lord Lennox was unable to grant these terms, so returned to his chief to report, and was to come back to the stronghold with reply as soon as possible."

"This gave Commodore Lafitte an opportunity to send me to you with his report, and to state that where he could not offer his fleet and entire force, as many are English, and there are other nationalities who would fight only for booty, he yet can bring a ship's crew of brave volunteers with several heavy guns, which will be at your disposal."

"This offer he bade me make to you."

"You certainly argue well in behalf of your buccaneer father, young man; but suppose the brig returns with the answer that Lafitte's terms are accepted, that they will increase his gold reward and give him the rank of commodore, and egad, I believe they will do it, what then will be the answer of the outlaw chief?"

"That he will make no terms with tyrants, your Excellency."

"Well said; but what proof have you that he will so reply?"

"My knowledge of him."

"You show great confidence in him."

"I have had cause to do so, sir."

"And we have only your simple word."

"You can have more if you wish, sir."

"What more?" asked General Jackson, who had left the questioning to Governor Claiborne.

"I am a pirate and the son of Lafitte, so keep me as a hostage, and if he does not do as he offers, make me the sacrifice by hanging me," was the prompt and significant answer.

The two leaders gazed with admiration upon the daring, handsome youth, glanced at each other an instant, and then General Jackson said brusquely:

"I accept the sacrifice."

The face of Leo did not change color, not even when he added:

"And I'll hang you as high as Haman if this pirate Lafitte means treachery."

"Do so, sir," was the calm reply of Leo.

Then the two officers walked apart and conversed together for some time in a low tone, when they again returned and took their seats.

Lafitte had remained standing while in their presence, his manner however being polite, though not humble, and he showed no sign of emotion when they again fixed their eyes upon him, and the general said:

"Now tell us what the offer of Lafitte is, young man?"

"To call for volunteers among his crew, and to come with them to your aid, running up the river with a vessel bearing his crew, guns and small-arms."

"And the remainder of his force?"

"Will remain at the stronghold to fight off the British, as Lord Lennox gave us an extra inducement, for Commodore Lafitte's accepting his offer, that in case of its refusal, the English fleet would attack and destroy the pirate retreat."

"Which they can doubtless do."

"Perhaps so, sir, but they will hardly go out of their way to attack a few pirates, from whom they would only get hard knocks in return, when their aim is to take New Orleans and annihilate the American Army."

"Well said, young sir; but you are sure that Lafitte asks no terms of us?"

"He hopes for pardon, sir, of course, and if it is refused him, after he has done his duty, to give him safe permit out of your lines."

"And you are willing to remain our prisoner as a guarantee of his good faith?"

"Yes, sir."

"I accept his offer, Governor Claiborne," said General Jackson.

"And I, general; but how are we to communicate with Lafitte?"

"I will write him a letter, sir, which you can read and then send by messenger to a large live-oak tree growing upon the river-bank just below your outer guard, and there give it to a negro who awaits me."

"The signal of the messenger will be three whistles and the word Barrataria, and the negro will advance, and he will take the letter to Commodore Lafitte and bring you reply."

"Ah! but how did you get within our lines?" cried the general suddenly, as he recalled how thoroughly the town was sentinelled.

"I captured the lower guard, sir, and the negro stands guard over him."

"By Heaven! but you are bold to throw this in my teeth!" the general said, with some anger.

"I wished to enter the city, sir, and knew not the countersign, and so captured the sentinel; but it was no fault of his, for my slave, who climbs like an ape, got into the tree and dropped down upon him unawares."

"Still, sir, it would be well to put two men on outpost duty on the river."

The general looked angry, then laughed and said:

"I accept your advice, young sir; but now write to Lafitte, tell him we will be glad to have him come to us with all the aid he can bring, and in return for his services we will pledge ourselves to do all in our power to have the President pardon him and his men."

"Say that when he arrives you are to be set free, and if he does not come, you are to be hanged."

"Yes, sir," and Leo sat at the Governor's desk and hastily wrote the letter in a bold, handsome hand.

"You refer to him not once as your father," said the Governor, glancing over it.

"He is my commander, sir, and only when we are alone do I refer to him as my father."

"Ah! discipline must be very thorough in that pirate camp!" said the general.

"It is, sir, and disobedience and neglect of duty mean death," was the quiet response.

"Well, Master Leo, for so I see you sign yourself, you will be placed under guard, but not ill-treated, and I hope that your pirate father will win pardon by his gallantry in defense of this city."

"Now, Governor, it will be best to send a staff officer with this letter, and if you will select one, this young man can give him full instructions how to find the negro, so that there will be no mistake."

Half an hour after Leo was in prison, and the staff officer had departed upon his mission.

CHAPTER VIII.

T H E A N S W E R .

LAFITTE sat alone in his quarters.

It was night, and the light of a ship's cabin lamp fell upon him from above his desk where it hung.

His face was stern, as it ever was, and his eyes seemed to wear a look as though gazing far back into the past, a past that had been a bitter one to him.

Within the room, which was large and comfortable, there was a quantity of furniture, all taken from vessels it was very evident, from its character.

Suddenly there came a knock upon the door. The pirate chief dropped his hand to his side, as though instinctively, when it rested upon a pistol, and then said, in his deep, mellow voice:

"Come in."

The door opened and a negro entered.

He was a man of short stature, for his legs were shorter than his arms; but his body was long, heavily built, and his shoulders denoted great strength.

His arms were long and muscular, and his movements were quick and decided.

His head was small, his face cunning and fearless and his eyes small and fierce in expression.

Upon his head he wore a red silk turban, and his clothing consisted only of a woolen shirt and white duck trowsers, with a scarlet silk sash about his waist, and in the latter was thrust a long, ugly-looking knife.

He was barefooted and his only ornament was a necklace of the rattles of rattlesnakes, to which was hung a pair of wings taken from a yellow oriole.

"Well, Coola, you are back again—where is Lieutenant Leo?" asked Lafitte.

"Coola back, Master Leo stay; sent this letter," answered the negro in a deep voice that was suppressed to keep down its power.

The chief looked surprised, and took the letter hastily, breaking the seal.

His face darkened as he read it, and he muttered:

"They are suspicious of me!"

"Well, why should they not be, after all that I have done?"

"I am a pirate, offering to do an honorable act, and honest men cannot understand it."

"Well, they shall see that Lafitte can keep his word, and I will report for orders as soon as I have returned my answer to this gallant Englishman."

"I meant well; but even had I not, that boy should not be sacrificed."

"No, no, for if they harmed a hair of his head, biter would I avenge him."

Then turning to Coola, he said:

"You have done well, Coola."

"Now bid Captain Rafael come to me here."

The slave saluted and departed, and once again Lafitte became lost in painful reverie.

Soon after there entered a young man, with a dark, handsome face, yet one that was reckless and dissipated in look.

"Be seated, Rafael, for I wish to talk with you."

"Yes, Commodore Lafitte," and the young man took the decanter shoved toward him and dashed off a glass of brandy with evident relish.

"Rafael, you love the English, I believe?"

"Maldito! I hate them, Senor Chief."

"So you do, and would like to get a chance to strike them a blow?"

"With pleasure, senor."

"And for doing so a pardon for your acts of piracy?"

"Ah, senor, it could not be."

"It will be, I am assured; but you must take the same chances that I do, and others with me."

"You know I am one to follow your lead, Commodore Lafitte!"

"I know it well, and I would say to you that I intend to go in my schooner to New Orleans, with a crew of men whom I can wholly trust, and you can act as my first luff."

"I think some eighty, or a hundred men can be secured, but it must be done secretly, for those who go along must know that we are to aid the Americans in the defense of New Orleans, and in return stand good chances of a full pardon for our services."

"Ah, senor!"

"I mean it, Rafael, and I am anxious to haul down my black flag and live a life of honor to try and atone for the past, as I know that you are."

"Indeed, am I, Senor Lafitte."

"I will leave Captain Ricardo here in command of the stronghold, and, once we have gained pardon, I feel that we can negotiate terms for the balance of the men, and if any do not care to receive amnesty, they must take their chances as outlaws."

"Certainly, Senor Lafitte."

"Now, Rafael, get on board of my vessel, the Destiny, all the men you can pick out as willing to go with us, and here is a list of names of those I am sure of."

"Be ready to sail at a moment's notice, and have ample ammunition and small arms on board."

"Now send Captain Ricardo to me."

The pirate officer bowed and retired, and soon after another entered.

It was Captain Ricardo, Lafitte's second in command, and a man who was known to be merciless to foes, possessed no friendships and made gold his god.

He was a splendid seaman, commanding his crew with an iron hand and fought them like demons, for he was a brave man, that being his only redeeming virtue.

"Captain Ricardo, I am going upon a secret mission, with a crew of picked officers and men, and I wish you to remain in command of the stronghold, and allow none of our vessels to put to sea, while any of those now cruising that may come in, must remain and await my return."

"I had intended sailing to-morrow, Commodore Lafitte, for my vessel is fully repaired now; but your word is law."

"Certainly, and you insist on it that not a man leaves the stronghold until my return."

"Yes, chief."

"And it would be well to keep your eyes upon the coming of an enemy, as I have reason to fear an attack by the British fleet."

"We can beat them off, sir."

"Doubtless, if you are not surprised."

"I will see that we are not, sir."

"I feel that I can rely upon you, Ricardo, and so leave all in your charge."

"When do you sail, sir?"

"As soon as a British brig, the same that was here the other day, returns, and I have given my answer to the offer made me to join forces with the English in their attack on New Orleans."

"Ah! that then was why the brig came?"

"Yes."

"And may I ask your answer, Señor Lafitte?"

"I am an American, Ricardo, and will not lead traitors to my native land."

The Spanish captain bowed and rose, while he said:

"The American would doubtless offer big terms for your services, sir?"

"Perhaps so," was the quiet response of Lafitte, and his bow showed that the interview had ended, and so Ricardo retired.

When the day dawned a vessel was seen in sight, and Coola awakened his master with the information that it was the English brig.

Ordering his barge gotten ready Lafitte dressed in his best uniform and went down to the beach.

Taking a seat in the stern-sheets he gave the order to the oarsmen to give way, and the barge started out of the harbor.

He steered close under the stern of the schooner Destiny, and called out to Captain Rafael, who stood on deck:

"Be ready with your picked crew, to sail when yonder craft is hull down."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The barge then held on its way out of the harbor to the brig, which had come to.

When it had approached within a mile the order was given to rest on the oars, and a signal was made to send a boat from the brig.

Seeing that the barge would not come nearer a boat was lowered and Lord Lennox entered it.

The oarsmen pulled rapidly away, and soon the boats were but a few lengths apart.

"Ah, Commodore Lafitte, I had expected to see that handsome son of yours, and not yourself; but I am glad you have come," said Lord Lennox.

"Lieutenant Leo is engaged just now, so I came myself, Lord Lennox."

"And I came to say that your demand has been accepted, and to place the papers in your hands."

"And I have come to say, Lord Lennox, that though I feel flattered at the very high manner in which my services are regarded, I would tell you that I am an American, and, as such, no offer can tempt me, pirate though I be, to become a traitor to my native land."

"So report to your commander in chief."

The nobleman seemed nettled at this reply, and his face flushed; but he said:

"May I not ask you to reconsider your determination to so return answer?"

"I have decided, sir."

"You will regret it."

"I will abide the result, my lord."

"The offer is most tempting, and—"

"Granted; but it would be treacherous in me to accept it."

"Have the Americans offered a higher price?" and the Englishman spoke with a sneer.

"I have asked no terms of the Americans, Lord Lennox."

"I am a pirate, and a price is set upon my head by them, as well as by other nations."

"You have my answer, sir, so I will bid you adieu."

A motion from Lafitte, and the crew of the barge gave way, and Lord Lennox was forced to return to the brig, greatly chagrined at the result of his mission, which he had believed would be successful.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRIZE.

The "flag-ship" of the pirate fleet was as pretty a little craft as floated the seas.

She was as trim as a yacht, carried sail enough for a vessel of double her tonnage, and a battery that was very heavy for a craft of her size.

Stanch as a line-of-battle ship in a gale, yet she glided along like a cat-boat under the merest breath of a breeze.

Lafitte was most proud of his vessel, and she had never played him false, but on many an occasion had shown a clean pair of heels to her foes.

A red ribbon encircled her hull from stem to stern, and she was sharp as a wedge forward and very narrow astern.

Every sail fitted perfectly, every rope was in its place, and her crew were as well disciplined as man-of-war's men.

Beneath the bowsprit was a figure-head of a

pair of golden wings, and this fact caused her to be called the Golden Wings more often than she was by her own name, Destiny.

In fact, the insignia of Lafitte was a pair of golden wings, and, instead of having the skull and crossbones, he had the wings embroidered in gold in the center of the sable field.

The cabin of the schooner was most richly furnished, and the books in several languages, a guitar and flute, with several sketches of marine views, showed that the outlaw master was a man of refined taste, as well as of intelligence, and possessed of talent in no mean degree.

Having seen the British brig-of-war hull down, Rafael had signaled to his chief, who was still at his quarters ashore, and repairing on board, the anchor had been gotten up, sail set, and the Destiny went flying out of the harbor, all at the stronghold, from Captain Ricardo down, wondering what secret mission their chief was bound on.

As the Delta of the Mississippi hove in sight, a vessel was descried lying to, as though on picket duty off the mouth of the river.

Taking his glass and going aloft, Rafael reported in a short while that the stranger was a British brig-of-war, for her colors were flying, and she was fully double the tonnage of the schooner.

"She is evidently lying in wait for American vessels," said Lafitte.

"Yes, señor."

"You are sure she is not the brig-of-war Vulture, which brought me the message yesterday?"

"No, sir, she is not the Vulture."

"Well, we have not been seen here inshore, and we will strip the schooner of canvas and lie to until night, when we will run down and engage her."

"She is a most powerful foe, sir."

"That may be; but we have extra men and guns, and I believe can capture her."

"If she proves too strong, we know these waters, and can run in and escape her."

"I shall fight her, Rafael."

With this determination the schooner was run in under the shelter of the land and stripped for action.

Darkness was near at hand, and when it settled upon the sea, as the wind was off-shore, only a jib was set, covered with dark cloth, to prevent its white surface from being seen in the night.

Then, before the wind, which was blowing an eight-knot breeze, the schooner glided slowly down upon the British vessel.

The land in the background also aided to keep her concealed, while, as she approached the brig loomed up with almost startling distinctness.

That she was double the size of the schooner all could see, and her battery must indeed be a formidable one, while her crew could scarcely number less than a hundred and twenty men.

But the men of Lafitte knew their chief.

He was considered invincible, and had they been sure of defeat they would not have dared to remonstrate.

The brig was at anchor, evidently keeping a close watch upon the passes of the river, and seaward, yet not expecting a foe from the direction in which the schooner was coming.

"We will hail, then give her a broadside, run up our fighting canvas, give her another broadside and board, Señor Rafael," said Lafitte quietly.

Rafael saw that the plan of his chief was a good one.

If they could get within close range of the brig before being discovered, they could gain a great advantage, for the crew would be surprised, the anchor would have to be gotten up, the sails set, and by the time the Englishman was under way the schooner could run down upon her and board.

The crew now felt that their daring chief had calculated well, and were anxious for the fray.

Nearer and nearer drew the schooner, not a light visible on board, and only her cloth-covered jib set, which carried her along before the wind at a knot and a half pace to the hour.

The brig, all unsuspecting it seemed, rode restlessly at her anchors and loomed up large and threatening before the little schooner.

"Now set her fighting sails, Rafael, while I hail," said Lafitte, as the schooner was in long hauling distance.

Then out over the waters rung the deep voice of the pirate chief.

"Ho the brig aboy! what brig is that?"

That the hail took those on the brig-of-war by surprise, was to be seen, for voices were heard on board, with running feet, and stern orders.

Not wishing to strike a blow without warning Lafitte repeated:

"Ahoy! What brig is that?"

"The British brig-of-war Fearnought."

"Who are you?" came in response.

"Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, and I mean to take you!"

As Lafitte spoke he gave a signal to the helmsman, the bows of the schooner swept around and the hull seemed to burst forth in flames, as the guns of the port broadside flashed forth.

The aim of the gunners was true, and the effect upon the brig was most damaging.

Then the starboard broadside followed with equal destruction, and now, under what canvas she needed for easy handling, the schooner bore rapidly down upon the enemy.

The crew of the brig-of-war had been taken wholly off their guard.

The first broadside of the schooner had dismounted one of her guns and laid half a dozen men dying and dead upon her decks.

The second broadside had been even more destructive in the loss of life, and, with their anchor to get up, sail to set, unable to strike back and her men not at quarters, it certainly looked ominous for the Englishman.

But at last the anchor left the bottom, some canvas was spread, and the brig swung round to meet her foe, while her men were now at her guns.

But Lafitte had calculated well, and, as she did so another broadside was poured upon her, then a terrible volley of musketry, and the schooner was close aboard her foe.

"Boarders ahoy! follow me! Lay her aboard, Rafael!"

With these orders the schooner came against the brig with a shock that threw many from their feet.

But over the bulwarks sprung Lafitte, followed by his wild crew, and in an instant grapnels were thrown and the battle for life or death begun upon the deck of the brig.

The English tars had been surprised, and this was against them.

Then they had suffered terribly by the three broadsides of the schooner, while the volley of musketry had laid many a man low.

Still they were gallant hearts of oak, and met the pirates bravely.

Had their foes been other than pirates, they might have beaten them back; but, trained to the wildest fighting, reckless devils that they were, and led by their loved chief, the crew of the schooner swept all before them, beat the Englishmen down at all points, hurled some into the sea and forced them to cry for quarter.

"The prize is won, and it may help me in the eyes of those who doubt me," he thought, and he gave orders to Rafael to remain on board with a prize crew and follow the schooner into the river.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

AGAIN were Govenor Claiborne and General Jackson seated in the house of the former, discussing earnestly the situation of affairs.

The city was now nothing more than a military camp, and soldiers were seen upon all sides, while a chain of sentinels encircled the town.

The river was full of guard boats, patrolling here and there, and one and all, from the lowliest slave to the commander-in-chief felt keenly the strained situation.

Troops were arriving from the up country, to aid in the defense of the city, and General Jackson was doing all in his power to form an army out of the recruits under his command.

Of course there were bickering and jealousies, for the "city fathers" believed in having things their way, the naval contingent wished to have full sway, and the army would not be slighted, as upon it the safety of New Orleans rested, and that meant the safety of all that part of the country.

A naval officer had heard the story from Governor Claiborne of Lafitte's offer, and scouted the idea, saying that treachery was at the bottom of it.

The Governor believed in the truth of Lafitte, and in this General Jackson firmly concurred; but the "city fathers" sided with the naval officer, who had been fitting out a fleet to go and attack the pirate stronghold.

So it was argued that the commodore should sail in his fleet and attack Lafitte, thus destroying his usefulness to the English in their advance.

Out of the river the fleet had sailed, and, discovering it, Lafitte, with his schooner and prize had lain in hiding until it had passed out of all

danger to himself, little dreaming of the destination of the American flotilla.

Thus it was that the general and Governor sat discussing the situation, when the door softly opened and a tall form entered the room.

The visitor wore a uniform, and over his shoulders was thrown a cloak, for the night was chilly.

His splendid bearing and unknown face caused the two heads to look up with both admiration and amazement, for he had not been announced.

"You are Governor Claiborne, sir, I believe, and you, General Jackson, sir?" said the stranger, advancing toward the table, on either side of which the two were seated.

"You are right, sir, I am Governor Claiborne and this gentleman is General Jackson; but may I ask your name, and why you come unannounced into our secret chamber?"

"Had I announced myself, your Excellency, I would not have been admitted, and so took the liberty of giving the countersign to your sentinel and entering as though it was my right."

"And why are you here, sir?"

"To report the capture of the British brig-of-war, Fearnought, twenty-four guns."

"Ha! this is good news; but though you wear a naval uniform, I note that it is not that of our navy?"

"No, sir, it is not, I regret to say; but the British brig lies at anchor above the town, and I beg to give her over to you, General Jackson, as a prize."

"But she is the prize of our fleet which sailed two days ago to—"

"I saw the fleet, sir, but the brig was already my prize, and I preferred to surrender her to you, so avoided the squadron and sailed on up the river."

"And again I ask, sir, your name?" the Governor said sternly.

"My name is Lafitte the Pirate, Governor Claiborne," was the startling reply of the strange visitor.

Both the Governor and general were upon their feet in an instant.

They were men without fear; but this way of being confronted by Lafitte, upon whose head a large price was set, was out of the usual run of things.

They were wholly taken aback, and Lafitte, with folded arms, stood coolly regarding them.

"You are Lafitte?" said General Jackson, after an instant of painful silence.

"I am, sir."

"And you have captured the British brig-of-war Fearnought, and bring her here as a prize?"

"I do, sir."

"Where is your fleet?"

"At my stronghold, excepting my schooner in which I came here."

"And do you mean to say that you captured that splendid brig with your little schooner?"

"Yes, sir; but we caught her crew napping."

"And your schooner is here in the river?"

"Yes, sir, anchored near the brig."

"And how reached you your anchorage?"

"I reported my vessel the American privateer Brixom, with a British prize, and as Lafitte was not expected to come up to the town, my story was believed, especially as I had the brig with me as proof of my words."

"And you come here to face us, when you know there is a price upon your head?"

"Yes, sir, I have come to keep my word, and have a brave crew with me, to aid in defending New Orleans."

"By these orders, found upon the captured brig, you will see that it is taken for granted that one Lafitte, a pirate commodore, will accept the magnanimous terms offered him, and lend his aid to the British."

"But, should he not do so, the captain of the brig is instructed as to his course, and given a hint as to what course General Packenham will take for the capture of New Orleans."

"As it would not do to let the British spies know of the brig's capture, or that Lafitte the Pirate is here to aid in defense of the city, I would like to withdraw up the river to a hiding-place, with the prize and my schooner, there to await your orders, gentlemen."

"You then take it for granted that we are to accept your services, Captain Lafitte?" said General Jackson.

"I so understand, sir, from the letter received from my young officer, about whom I would inquire?"

"He is well, and kindly cared for; but suppose we cannot promise you pardon in return for your services?"

"I must accept the alternative, gentlemen."

"We will do all in our power, Captain La-

fitte, and as you suggest a good plan regarding your vessel and the prize remaining in hiding, I will send a staff officer with you, to discover just where you can be found, and when needed, will at once satisfy you."

"Thank you, sir; but my aide, Lieutenant Leo?"

"Shall be released when you report for duty."

"Now, sir, I will call a staff officer, who will accompany you to the spot where you wish to hide, and please send him back in a boat, as it is best to keep the matter wholly a secret, as to your presence here."

Lafitte bowed, and soon after a young staff officer entered, and was given instructions as to what he was to do.

He started when the visitor was introduced as Lafitte, but accompanied him from the mansion without a word, and soon after the brig and the schooner were on their way up the river to find a safe hiding-place in which to await the moment when the pirate chief and his crew were needed.

CHAPTER XI.

A RECOGNITION.

THE scene now changes to the day of the famous battle of New Orleans, when Lafitte and Leo are introduced to the reader, standing on the breastworks that sheltered their heavy guns and calmly watching the effect of their fire.

Just in time the pirate chief had been sent for by General Jackson, and guns from the brig-of-war had been mounted on shore and manned by the crew of Lafitte.

During the midst of the fierce fight, General Jackson had seen the splendid service rendered by the pirate chief and his men, and also had he beheld, in riding along his line the utter contempt for danger which both Lafitte and Leo exhibited.

"They have surely won their pardon, and I fear me, but for their fire, the British would have gained our works at one time."

"I will certainly plead for them," General Jackson had said to himself.

Though beaten back the English kept up a scattering fire, to prevent retreat, and the Americans were replying to it with spirit, when a man entered the battery held by the pirates, glanced about him, and, as his eye fell upon the commanding form of Lafitte, he deliberately raised his pistol and fired.

The bullet struck the chief and he tottered back into the arms of Leo, who gently laid him upon the ground.

All was at once excitement, and in the moment of dismay at the bold act of the assassin, he sprung back over the breastwork, leaped down over the river-bank and disappeared.

"Did you seize that man?" cried Leo, in a voice that all heard.

"No, sir, he has escaped," cried one of the men.

"He shall not escape! follow me, a score of you," cried Leo.

"Hold!"

It was Lafitte who spoke.

"Ah! you live! I deemed you dead, my noble father," and Leo dropped upon his knees by the fallen chief.

"No, I am hard hit, for his bullet struck me here," and he laid his hand upon his right side.

"I will avenge his coward blow," said Leo.

"No, let him go."

"No, I will—"

"I command it, Leo! let him go, for he did what he deemed right."

"You know him, then, my father?"

"Yes, and it is my wish that no pursuit of him be made.

"Have the men bear me from the field and you command the battery."

Lafitte bowed in obedience of the command of Lafitte, and half a dozen men formed a litter and bore the chief away from the battery.

The guns yet roared angrily, and both sides were keeping up a sullen fire.

But the victory was won by the Americans, and under the shadows of night the British army retreated, broken and disheartened, leaving large numbers of dead and wounded upon the field.

In the exciting scenes that followed, no one took thought of Lafitte and the magnificent services rendered by him and his pirate crew.

So Leo sent the men back upon the schooner, which had now dropped down to a short distance above the city.

Then Leo went in search of his father, whom he almost dreaded to see, fearing he would find him dead.

To accommodate the wounded the sacred halls of the convent had been thrown open, and

thither had a good priest bade the sailors who bore their wounded chief to take him.

He was not known as Lafitte, and his brilliant uniform caused those at the convent to suppose him to be some distinguished officer, and he was borne into a pleasant room overlooking the garden.

A priest skilled in surgery, and who had given up his practice as a physician to take holy orders, examined the wound and probed for the bullet.

"Is it fatal, father?"

The one who asked the question was a beautiful nun, her face white, and her lips quivering.

She stood with hands clasped and a look of anguish that had the priest gazed toward her he could not but have noticed.

"The bullet glanced on the rib, and has made an ugly, but not fatal wound, good Sister Mercedes," replied the worthy father, and he continued:

"I will dress the wound most carefully and then leave the patient to your tender care, for then I know he will not be neglected."

Advancing toward the nun he continued in a whisper:

"His uniform shows him to be some distinguished officer, and he wears jewels of rare value—see, his sword-hilt is fairly ablaze with gems, so he must possess vast riches, and when we save his life he will doubtless endow the church liberally."

"See to him, good Sister Mercedes; but mayhap you may know who he is, as you have long resided in New Orleans."

"No! no! no! he is as one dead to me," she said with considerable excitement, and noticing it, the priest added:

"You must not excite yourself, Sister Mercedes, or you will be a bad nurse; but I wonder not, when the roar of the guns has been so fearful."

"Now I will leave you, for see, he sleeps; but I will visit him often, and when you need aid call upon Solace to help you."

"I will need no aid; I will care for him alone," said the nun, seeming in vain trying to hide an emotion that threatened to overwhelm her.

The priest shook his head, and then left, and taking a fan the nun approached the wounded pirate.

She made no sound, but stood regarding his face with an eager, burning gaze.

"It is he—I knew him at a glance as I saw them bear him in."

"And yet I deemed him dead."

"Dead! would to God he had died in the long ago, ere he became what that sailor told me he was—Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf," and with a moan the nun sunk upon her knees by the side of the cot and held over the wounded chief her crucifix, as though in silent supplication.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NUN AND THE PIRATE.

FOR some moments did the nun remain upon her knees, in an agony of silent grief.

Then she raised her head and gazed at the wounded man.

He still slept soundly, under the influence of the soothing draught given him by the priest.

"A pirate! ah, can it be true?" she murmured.

"And yet it is true, for can I forget that noble face, that splendid form, though it has been twenty years since I saw him."

"A little gray on the temples, a little more compact, yet still the same."

"No, not the same! oh God! not the same."

"Then his face wore a bright smile, one full of hope and joy, and his eyes shone with a tenderness that was most winning."

"Now the face is stern almost to cruelty, and his eyes, as I met them, were piercing as an eagle's, and seemed to look with defiance upon death."

"A moment as he lay here, I thought I saw the look change to sadness, as though he were looking back into the past."

"I did not dare tell the priest who he was, for, good as Father Felix is, he might have bade them hear the—the—oh! I cannot say the word that tells what he has become."

"And can it be that he is Lafitte?"

"He who has made the very seas quake with his name?"

"Can it be that this man, he whom I—no, I forget, for I must not speak of the past now."

"I am a nun, wedded to the church, and all thought of the past must be torn from my heart."

"But I will care for him, oh! so tenderly, and

if he lives, I will implore him to give up his evil life and live for repentance."

She again let her head fall upon her hands, and her whole frame shook with emotion.

Suddenly she started, as though an adder had stung her, for upon her ears fell the low-spoken name:

"Mercedes!"

She was upon her feet in an instant.

Memories of the past had almost unnerved her, and hearing her name spoken, as often she had before from the same lips, she remembered that she was now no longer of the world.

But a glance at the wounded man showed her that he was still sleeping.

He had uttered her name in a dream.

Then upon his lips came a smile, and the old beauty of his face came back in that instant.

The stern, cruel look faded away, the hard lines of care and sorrow faded from the lips and she recalled him as he had been to her over twenty years before.

Again his lips parted, and once more he uttered the name:

"Mercedes."

Then followed the words:

"Mercedes, I love you."

She stood trembling like a woman upon whom a great fear had fallen.

She had believed her heart dead to the world, and yet the coming of this man before her, his words, showed that she was still human.

She saw that he still slept, and the words proved to her that the score of years that had gone by had not driven her from his memory, or his heart.

Suddenly he opened his eyes.

Her gaze riveted upon his face had awakened him.

She saw the blood rush into his face, and then recede, as his eyes met hers.

That she was recognized in that one glance she well knew.

She wore the garb of a nun, and years had gone by since last those two met.

But she was still very beautiful, her old-time beauty having a halo upon it that was almost saintly.

"Mercedes! is it you? or am I still dreaming? for I did dream of the olden time and that we were seated upon the cliff overhanging the sea, at our old home."

"I am awake now, and yet I see you, for it is you, Mercedes."

He spoke in his deep, mellow voice, and his eyes were fastened full upon her.

She was strong now, once again the nun, and she said in low tone:

"I was Mercedes Latour, Achile; but now I am Mercedes, the nun."

"And it is I who drove you to this life of a recluse, drove you out of the bright world that you loved so well?" he said bitterly.

"No, it was the will of Heaven, and I did as conscience dictated, Achile."

"And do you know who I am?"

"Yes, Achile, my cousin."

"Once, Achile Latour, your cousin, good Mercedes; but not now, for that name is buried forever in the grave of the past."

"Do you know me as I am to-day?"

"You have been wounded, Achile, in the battle, and though the wound is said not to be fatal, it yet is a severe one, and you must keep quiet, so talk no more."

"You evade my question; but I must have an answer."

"Do you know me as I am?"

"Yes, Achile."

"What know you of me, Mercedes?"

"I know that your name has long been a terror upon land and sea."

"I know you as Lafitte; but have hope, Achile, ask forgiveness of Heaven and you may yet atone for the past."

She spoke earnestly, and he seemed to writhe with mental anguish under her words.

For a moment he was quiet, and then he said, and in a voice that seemed to be reading a lesson from the past.

"Mercedes, I have not allowed myself to dwell upon the by-gone, for I felt that there was madness in it to me."

"Now, again meeting you, I look back to the old home where once I lived a happy boy, with my brother Henri, and our father."

"Perhaps it was father's love for Henri that first warped my nature, as he was loved, and I was not, from some strange reason I never could account for."

"You came to our home, our cousin, and as my father's ward."

"You were beautiful, rich and all that was lovable in woman."

"I loved you, and my brother did also; but I soon saw that it was intended by my father that you should be Henri's wife."

"You had confessed your love for me, and here I meant not to yield, as I had always done to my younger brother."

"One day—can I ever forget it?—you told me that you must break with me and become Henri's wife."

"That maddened me, and I went out upon the cliff to brood over my sorrow."

"There, late at night, Henri came to seek me, and in my madness, for I was mad with despair, I struck a blow at his heart with my knife!"

"In horror I fled, believing that I had killed him, and, Cain-accursed, I became a wanderer about the world."

"To drown my thoughts, I went into scenes of carnage, and thus it was that I became what I am now—a pirate."

"I believed, until a short while ago, that Henri died by my hand."

"But to my great joy I discovered that the wound had not been fatal, and the joy of that discovery none but myself can ever know."

"He lives and you live; but why you never became his wife, I know not."

She had stood like a statue while he spoke, and now, as he paused, she said:

"I never married him because I did not love him."

"I told you that I loved you, and it was only by pleadings, threats and fear that I broke with you and promised to marry Henri."

"Had you been less hasty, you should have known all; but your mad act against your brother's life sent you a fugitive from home, made you an outcast, a wanderer about the world—made you what now you are."

He groaned in agony of spirit, while she continued, in the same sad, yet merciless tones:

"You, whom I loved, a fugitive. I would not marry one I did not love, and so I gave up the world and took the veil."

"Henri I have never heard from since, for I have utterly severed myself from every memory of the past."

"You were brought here several hours ago, desperately wounded, as all believed; but I knew you at once, and for a while I forgot that I was a nun, and all the old love rushed back upon me."

"But I am strong now; I am once more Mercedes, the nun; and I will care for you, Captain Lafitte, as I would the veriest unfortunate that came to my hands."

"I will pray Heaven to forgive you—I will pray that you may repent."

"Now rest, for you need sleep and must be quiet, for such are the orders of Father Felix, your surgeon, and the good priest in charge."

He gazed at her in utter amazement, for her words were spoken as though not an atom of love remained in her heart for him.

He seemed about to reply earnestly to her, when she placed her finger upon her lips and turned toward the door, where now entered two persons.

One was Father Felix, the priest, and the other was Leo.

"Is he awake, good Sister Mercedes, for here is a young man who says that he is his son, and I have brought him with me."

"His son," and the words came through the set teeth of Mercedes, who felt at that moment as though all of her strength would leave her and that after all her life of exile from the world, that she would still prove herself to be only flesh and blood—a woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEO AND MERCEDES.

"Ah! my father, I have found you, and this good priest has told me that you are not fatally wounded."

So spoke Leo, as he advanced to the side of Lafitte, who, with a smile, held forth his hand.

As Leo entered, Father Felix drew Sister Mercedes to one side, and said in a low tone:

"Your patient is better?"

"Yes, he has been asleep, and awoke much refreshed," and Mercedes strove hard to still the wild beating of her heart.

"I have found out who he is, Sister Mercedes."

Her heart almost ceased its beating, and she could make no reply.

"I hope that the knowledge will make no change in your kind heart toward him, for it is those who are sinners that we should be most kind to, for they need our care and kindness more than the good."

"He is a man whose name has been dreaded in every land, and upon whose head a price is set; but he refused to aid the British in their march against us, though offered pardon, gold and rank in the English Navy, and volunteered his services to Governor Claiborne."

"He fought most nobly through the battle, and many admit that but for his battery the British would have entered our works."

"At the very last moment he was mysteriously wounded, and I am glad they brought him here, for others might not have been as kind to a pirate!"

"A pirate?" echoed Mercedes.

"Yes, for he is Lafitte."

"Lafitte!"

"Yes, sister; but let not this knowledge sway you in your treatment of him, I pray you."

"It shall not," and she spoke the words firmly.

"I have just seen Governor Claiborne, and he is most earnest in his praise of Lafitte and his men, as is also General Jackson."

"They say that the pirate and his brave son there, stood upon the works during the entire action, and showed an utter disregard of danger."

"They have already made an appeal for his pardon, and it is to be hoped will get it for him, while General Claiborne seems greatly chagrined that an American fleet has been sent to attack and destroy Lafitte's stronghold and vessels, while he is here with his best men defending New Orleans, and in coming here attacked and captured a large brig-of-war double his own strength."

"Did he do this, father?" eagerly asked Mercedes.

"Yes, and asked no terms for his services, merely expressing the hope of pardon for himself and crew."

"Heaven, I thank Thee! there is hope for even his repentance," murmured Mercedes, and promising to return again in a short while, Father Felix departed.

Then Mercedes turned her gaze upon Leo, as she stood half concealed beyond the doorway.

"His son? How strange indeed."

"And who is the mother of that noble-looking youth?

"He cannot but know that his father is Lafitte."

"Yet he loves him, as his every look and action shows."

"How I would like to know more of that boy, and of his mother."

"Does she still live?"

"Does she know that her husband is a pirate?"

"But I must still these thoughts for they are unworthy of me."

"I have given up the world, yes, I am buried to all love and feelings outside of the church—I am Mercedes the Nun."

So saying she turned away and walked out upon the little balcony, where she stood with her hands clasped upon her heart, as though lost in reverie, or prayer.

After remaining a long while at the bedside of Lafitte, Leo bade him farewell, promising to return in the morning, when he hoped to find him much better.

His step aroused Mercedes from her reverie, or silent devotion, and she turned to escort him from the room to the gate in the garden.

The youth bowed low to her, and said in a pleasant way:

"I feel that my father is in kind hands indeed, and I thank you for your care of him, sweet nun."

"He is your father?" she asked, unable to retain the impulse to question him.

"Yes, lady."

"The priest tells me that he fought most bravely in defense of the city?"

"Ah, yes, for he could not do otherwise, as he is the bravest of the brave."

"And you too are a sailor?"

"Yes, lady."

"And love the sea, sir?"

"Ah, indeed I do, for it has been my home since infancy."

"I was born upon the sea, lady, and excepting our island retreat, have never known other home."

"And are you, too, like Lafitte?" she asked, in a low tone.

"You mean a pirate?"

"Yes."

"I am what I have ever been, lady—a pirate, if so you will," was the frank response of Leo.

Mercedes sighed, and then said, and her voice quivered as she uttered the words:

"I should think it would break your mother's heart to know that her son was a pirate."

"Lady, I have no mother, for she died in my infancy, and I have never known her."

"My father has been my all—father, mother, friend and commander, and I love him as I would love all, for I know no other loves, have no other friendships, unless it is for Coola, a slave, and Rafael, one of our captains."

"But be good to my father, I pray you, good sister, for though men hate him, though he is feared and called the cruellest of the cruel, he yet has a noble motive and a kind heart, and though I know not what bitter grief he holds in his bosom, I feel that he was driven to become what he is by circumstances that he could not control."

"What he is a cruel Fate has made him, and be he what he may, I love him as though he were the purest of the pure, and will not desert him."

"Good-by, sweet lady, and be good to my father, even though he be Lafitte."

He took her hand as he spoke, and, bending over, raised it to his lips.

She started, but he had gone, leaving his kiss burning upon her hand, the kiss of Lafitte's son, the son of a man she had ever loved.

She was almost overwhelmed with grief, and tottering back to the balcony, threw herself down upon a settee to mourn in bitterness of spirit over her unhappy lot.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PIRATE ORGIE.

CAPTAIN RICARDO, who had been left by Lafitte in charge of the island, was a thoroughly good officer, as has been said before.

But he had one fault, and that was, when he deemed that there was no danger threatening, he was wont to drink heavily.

After the departure of the chief in his schooner he certainly did not dread danger.

He felt that the Americans had all that they could attend to in looking after the British army and fleet, and so expected no trouble from them.

As to the British he was sure that there was too much at stake for them in their advance on New Orleans, to come and attack the island of Lafitte, where they would get only hard knocks for their pains.

Where Lafitte had gone Captain Ricardo could not imagine.

He had heard that he had more heavily armed his schooner, increased his crew to nearly a hundred men and had picked the men at that.

It did not strike him that the picked men were mostly Americans, French and Spaniards, who bitterly hated the English.

He therefore supposed that his chief had gone upon an expedition to cut out some richly-loaded store-ship of the British fleet and would not return for weeks.

It therefore invited Captain Ricardo to indulge himself in his favorite weakness of getting on a spree.

He took up his quarters at Lafitte's cabin home, within the stockade fort, gave orders to his lieutenant to sober him up when it was nearing the time for the chief's return, or if he saw him threatened with a case of delirium tremens, and under no other circumstances but these to disturb him in his blissful drowning of a guilty conscience by strong drink.

Seeing their leader enjoying himself in his own way, the officers began to feel that they too would indulge themselves in an *orgie*.

This they did, but were careful to keep out of sight of Captain Ricardo, whose sense of discipline was such that he would have at once gotten sober to punish the delinquents, had he discovered anything going wrong in his command.

The men also had their idea as to a revel on their part, and following the example of their superiors began to feast themselves and take life as it came to them.

Many of the richest stores were broken open, wine was made to flow like water, and delicacies from many lands found their way down pirate throats until the mad crew were both gorged and drunk, and incapable of knowing what discipline was.

A few sober heads remained however, and these in vain tried to check the tide of revelry.

So it went on for weeks, until those who still kept their senses felt that they should act boldly, and at once they went in a body to Ricardo.

He was in a stupid state, into which he would relapse whenever the effects of the liquor began to wear off.

His brain did not at first take in the situation and he appealed to the brandy bottle to enliven his ideas.

Under this stimulant he began to understand,

and he heard the story of the two-score sober men who had come to him.

He heard in silence, while his brain was in a whirl, that it surely would soon be time for Lafitte's return.

He was told that his officers were all drunk, that no repairs had been made upon the vessels, that the men, excepting themselves, were in a beastly state of intoxication, and stores had been broken open and consumed, the most costly wines, intended by Lafitte for sale among the rich merchants and planters, had been consumed, and in fact that a wild orgie reigned supreme upon the island.

Ricardo listened attentively, while he kept his brain alive with brandy which he constantly sipped the while as though it had been nectar.

His brow darkened, his eyes flashed, and he began to awaken to the situation.

To aid him in this, a seaman reported a distant sail in sight, which it was thought was the Golden Wings.

This the better helped to arouse Ricardo.

He knew Lafitte, and understood heads would fall should he return and find matters as the men before him reported that they were.

"He will be as merciless as a Turk, and my head will be the first to fall," he muttered.

Then he bade the men begone, and that he would run the affairs of the little pirate community to suit himself.

They left at once.

Would he go back into the state of drunkenness from which he had been partially aroused by their report, or would he indeed sober up and punish those for the sins which he had led them into by his own example?

In a short while Ricardo left the headquarters and went down to the sea.

There a bath revived him, and then he began the process of "sobering up" in deadly earnest.

His first act was to send for his lieutenant, with whom he had left instructions what to do.

That worthy was too far gone in a state of inebriety to come.

So Ricardo called the sober crew about him and sent ten men to bring his lieutenant.

This they did, and a platoon had already been detailed to shoot him to death.

Partially sobered by his peril the lieutenant begged for life, telling Ricardo that he had set the example; but the man was merciless, he gave the order, and the pirate officer fell dead.

This had a wondrous effect upon all.

The news spread through the island, and upon the vessels of the little fleet, and rumor had it that more executions were to follow at sunrise.

Liquors and wines were at once a drug in the island, and a general sobering up was the result.

Darkness had fallen, and, to cool his fevered brow, and also with another purpose in view, Captain Ricardo had gone to the lookout on the hilltop.

That other purpose was to see how far off the reported sail in sight was.

As he glanced over the waters he uttered a cry of horror.

Then he bounded away and loud rung his voice through the island:

"To the port, men! to your ships, men!

"We are surprised by an enemy!"

CHAPTER XV.

WIPED OUT.

The sight which met the gaze of Ricardo was one indeed enough to terrify the stoutest heart among the pirate band.

There, not half a league off-shore, heading directly in for the harbor, and the leading vessel evidently under charge of a skillful pilot, was a fleet of a dozen sail.

There was a large brig in front, a smaller one in the rear, then several schooners, and astern of these half a dozen sloops of large size.

The wind was fair for them to stand directly into the harbor.

The moonlight shone with wonderful brilliancy, and the decks were seen to be armed and crowded with men.

Whether British or American Ricardo knew not.

Nor did he care, for either were foes.

He had been warned by Lafitte to keep an eye out for the British fleet.

He had left that warning unheeded, and here the foe was upon him.

His men, or three-fourths of them, were stupefied with dissipation, and his own head ached so that he could hardly collect his thoughts for action.

But the enemy must be met, and so he dashed

back to headquarters, sending forth that wild alarm as he ran.

The men heard, and at first believed that their leader was raving in delirium.

But then came the words:

"A large fleet is coming into the harbor to attack us, and we must beat them off, or every pirate here will hang."

Many rushed to the ridge, to behold the truth of the words uttered by Ricardo.

They saw that he spoke the truth, and then all seemed for the moment paralyzed.

But the danger made Ricardo once more himself, and he issued his orders to the wild-eyed, frightened men, sending some to the forts, others to their ships and forming the remainder into a reserve.

But just then the brig's sharp nose was seen shooting into the harbor, and from her bows belched forth shot after shot.

Others followed, and gaining an entrance, broadsides were poured upon the cabins, the forts and the shipping.

Well planned, and well executed, the attacking force proved to be the masters in a very short while, and though the Barratarians now fought with desperation, they were driven from their guns upon their vessels, and forced overboard.

A large force was then landed from the fleet and the stockade and its fort were stormed and taken, with Lafitte's quarters and the storehouse.

The fort on the cliff turned its guns upon the invaders, and the fleet poured broadside after broadside upon it for awhile, and then suddenly sending the crews ashore stormed and took it.

With every vessel but one captured, their forts silenced, and the invaders in possession, the pirates were forced to yield, those of them who had not fled to hiding-places on the island.

That one vessel that had escaped was Ricardo's own schooner.

He had fought bravely, until seeing that all was lost, he had rallied about him half a hundred men, and making a circuit to the beach, had seized the small boats of his foes, in which they had landed, and had boarded his own vessel.

A prize crew was on board, but they were hurled into the sea, the cable was slipped, sail set and the fleet schooner sped out to sea.

She was discovered and chase was made; but Ricardo knew his schooner, and held no fear.

Nor did she disappoint him, for the pursuers were quickly dropped astern and the daring officer, the cause of all the misfortune upon his fellow pirates, escaped, to seek new scenes of adventure, while the victorious Americans were gathering the rich fruits of their victory over the Barratarian Buccaneers.

Need the reader be told that the victors were the Americans sent to wipe out Lafitte's stronghold, while he, in good faith, had offered his services in defense of New Orleans against the British, whose generous offer he had refused?

Yet history tells us that such was the case.

A grand victory it was for the Americans, and rich indeed was the booty taken.

The naval officer in charge had hooted at the idea of Lafitte's honesty of purpose in offering his services in defense of New Orleans.

He had been anxious to strike a blow at the "Buccaneers' Nest," as the island was then called and the "city fathers" had urged him on.

With Lafitte absent, as it was known, with his own vessel and a number of his men, no better time could be chosen, and so the fleet had sailed, the surprise had been complete, owing to Ricardo's love of drink, and the conquest had been final, for two-thirds of the pirates had been destroyed, their vessels captured and a number taken prisoners.

The forts were dismantled, the booty taken on board, and the triumphant fleet, with the prizes, set sail for New Orleans to make known their success.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WOUNDED CHIEF.

"I WOULD speak with you, sir."

It was Mercedes who spoke, and she addressed Leo.

Lafitte was doing well, and yet his surgeon priest felt that there was something upon his mind that retarded his more rapid recovery.

Days had passed, weeks had come and gone, and the priest was forced to consider the wound more severe than he had at first supposed, for he had then told Lafitte he would hardly have to keep his bed longer than ten days.

Coola, his slave, had been sent by Leo to look after him, and the negro was tireless in his atten-

dance upon his wounded master, whom he seemed to fairly idolize.

Twice a day the father visited him, and looked to his wound, and now and then during the day and night Sister Mercedes was wont to drop in and see to his comfort.

Every delicacy that could be secured, was gotten for him, and his sick chamber was kept fragrant with the perfume of flowers.

Still Mercedes seemed to avoid being alone with the wounded man.

There were others whom she had under her care, and she was most kind to them; but they were not recipients of the devoted care bestowed upon Lafitte.

He would remain quiet and watch her, from the moment she entered the room, until she left it.

Once, as she smoothed his pillows, he had caught her hand and kissed it.

The hot blood had suffused her face, and from that moment she had never been alone with him.

Often had he tried to send Coola away, that he might talk with her; but she would bid the negro remain, while she would attend to the fictitious want which Lafitte had expressed, as an excuse to be alone with her.

Thus time passed on, until the day when she spoke the words to Leo, which open this chapter.

It was evening, near the sunset hour, and Leo, as was his wont, had come to pay his regular daily visit to his father and chief.

He was just entering the convent hall, which led to the sick-room, and there Mercedes had met him.

"Now, lady?" he had asked in answer to her question.

"No, sir; but before you leave your father, come into the garden the door of his room leads into."

"I will be there."

With this she glided away, and the youth went on his way, wondering at the request of the beautiful nun.

He had come to greatly admire her, and he had decided, from many little things that he had seen and heard, that his father and Mercedes were no strangers to each other, though they appeared to be so even in his presence.

Now he could not but wonder what it was that she had to communicate to him.

Walking on to the room where his father lay, he found him feeling much better.

Coola was by his side, fanning him, as he constantly did, for the faithful fellow seemed scarcely ever to sleep.

But the negro yielded his place to Leo, while Lafitte grasped his hand and smiled.

"Well, my son, you see I am getting better?"

"Yes, father, I am very happy to see it, too."

"Is there aught to tell me of news?"

"I know little, sir, other than that the Governor is most kind in asking about your health the several times that I have met him."

"I thank him; but does he say aught of a pardon for us, Leo?"

"No, sir; no more than that with the special report sent of the battle, a request was made for your pardon, and that of your men."

"With no response yet?"

"No, sir, though it is about time to hear."

"Yes, but where is the schooner?"

"She lies at anchor above the town, sir, in hiding, as I deemed it best to attract no attention."

"I see that you do not wear your uniform?"

"No, sir, I took it off, as I was recognized by some and called—"

"What?" asked the chief, as Leo paused.

"Well, sir, a pirate."

"You did right to avoid attracting attention, my son; but where are the men?"

"All on board the schooner, sir."

"You do not allow them to leave?"

"No, sir, I thought it better they should not."

"Yes; and Rafael?"

"He is there, also, sir, and keeps an eye on the men with me."

"And the British brig?"

"The prize?"

"Yes, Leo."

"She has been brought down to the city, and is now in charge of the Naval Department."

"Are these other vessels in port?"

"You mean war-vessels, father?"

"Yes."

"No, sir; and it is said that the fleet is away upon an expedition of importance, doubtless to strike the British squadron somewhere."

"I suppose so; but Leo, what do you think of the beautiful nun who is so kind to me?"

"I think she is most lovely, father—just such a woman as I wish was my mother."

The dark face of Lafitte flushed at this; but he asked:

"Have you held much converse with her?"

"No, sir; though she always has a kind word for me."

"Does she speak of me, Leo?"

"She has hoped for your rapid recovery, and says that she prays Heaven may bring you back out of the life you have led."

"Her prayers will be answered, Leo, for I shall not sail under the black flag again."

"I am more than happy to hear you say this, father, for it is only of late that my eyes have seen our career in the light that it is regarded by honorable men."

"I have been happy on a pirate deck, for I knew not, father, that I was such a sinner."

"It seemed always to me that we had a right to sail the seas and fight our foes, and that the Barratarians were a small nation among themselves, as other people among the West Indies are; but now I see more clearly, and I feel that the hand of every man is against us, and glad am I to hear you say that you will no longer be known as Lafitte the Pirate."

The youth had spoken earnestly, and every word he uttered had fallen keenly upon the ears of the listener.

"We will get our pardon, Leo, and then our lives shall be different."

"I promise you this, my son."

Lafitte pressed his hand, and then remembering that Mercedes the Nun had wished to see him, and he must return to the schooner by nightfall, he bade his father farewell, promising to call the next day, and while Coola resumed his place by the side of the wounded chief, he went out into the little flower-garden to seek the beautiful nun.

She was in a vine-covered arbor awaiting him, and as he joined her he saw by her sad face that she had something of importance to communicate to him, for her manner was nervous, her look one of anxiety.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NUN'S WARNING.

WHEN Leo joined Sister Mercedes in the little arbor, she said to him in a low tone:

"Sit down, Lieutenant Lafitte, for I am anxious to tell you that which I feel you should know."

Lafitte bowed and did as requested, while the nun sunk into a seat near him and, after a moment of silence, in which she seemed to be in deep thought, said:

"I am betraying confidence, perhaps, in telling you what I intend to; but I cannot help it, and I feel that I shall be forgiven."

"Is it of such importance that there can be any doubt of forgiveness in the simple making it known to me, lady?" asked Leo.

"It was from Father Felix I heard it, and he was talking with the Father Director of the monastery, who called upon him."

"They either did not know I was near, or thought I did not overhear them, and thus I learned that which you should know; but I pray you not to betray me!"

"No, indeed, dear lady, not for any consideration would I do aught to compromise you," Leo said, earnestly.

Again Mercedes was silent for some little time, as though communing with her thoughts.

Then she said in a voice strangely low, but distinct:

"It was of your father that they were speaking?"

"Yes, lady."

"Did General Jackson and Governor Clarendon pledge Captain Lafitte and his men a pardon, for their services?"

"No, lady; but they said they would do all in their power to obtain pardon for us all."

"And the city fathers?"

"Were not willing to promise anything."

"Well, it is those whom you have to fear."

"In what respect, lady?"

"I will tell you, as I understand it, sir."

"Pray do so."

"They, the two priests, were saying that the city fathers were not willing to acknowledge the services rendered by Captain Lafitte and his men, and had been instrumental in dispatching a fleet under a prominent naval officer to attack your stronghold."

"Ah! when was this?" quickly asked Leo.

"The fleet sailed some time ago, and against the wishes of the general and the Governor."

"This was treachery from others than pirates," Lieutenant Leo said, with bitterness.

"They certainly might have waited until the

recovery of your father, after what services he had rendered."

"I should think so; but what else heard you, lady?"

"That the commander of the fleet was ordered to destroy the stronghold, and kill or capture the—the pirates."

"They will find men there who know the art of war," Leo said with confidence.

"But, sir, the city fathers who urged that Captain Lafitte should be placed under guard, if not able to be moved from the convent."

"This, too?"

"And more, for your vessel was to be seized, and your men put in irons until word came from the President, for no pardon came with the dispatches in answer to those sent on about the battle."

"Indeed?"

"So Father Felix said, sir, and he was told to prepare quarters for a guard in the convent, who would be sent up to-morrow to make Captain Lafitte a prisoner, and keep him under their eye until he was able to be removed to prison."

"I thank you, dear lady; but it seems that these city fathers are anxious to hang Lafitte and his men, now they have gotten all the service out of them possible."

"It does appear so, sir; but I felt that you should know all, for I much fear me that should Captain Lafitte be arrested, his trial would quickly follow, and that would mean his execution, as base ingratitude seems to rule these men."

"It is true, lady, that Lafitte has been an outlaw, with a large prize upon his head, and the people of your city have doubtless suffered much from his lawless acts."

"But, when it is considered that he had it in his power to accept pardon from the British king, the rank of commodore in the Royal Navy, and a fortune in gold, and refused all to serve America, with no promises made him, something should be allowed him in return other than ingratitude."

"Had Commodore Lafitte joined the British, no power could have saved this city from capture, while, throwing his aid with the Americans, his enemies cannot but admit that he did his duty well."

"But, lady, I thank you for your warning, from the bottom of my heart, and thus warned by you, you may rest assured that Lafitte will not be made a prisoner to-morrow."

"But what would you do, sir?"

"The sea is before us, lady."

"Ah! you would not again raise the black flag?"

"Ah, no! I think the sable flag, with its wings of gold, will never again float over a vessel that my father commands; but we can at least be free upon the seas, until it is decided whether the President will pardon us."

"No, dear Sister Mercedes, let me again thank you for all that you have done for my father and myself."

He grasped the nun's hand as he spoke and a moment after she had glided away and left him.

She had given her warning, and well she knew that Lieutenant Leo would act promptly to save his father, from what she feared might be death on the gallows, for the bitterness against Lafitte far outweighed the feeling of admiration for his gallant services in their behalf.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEO'S PLOT.

To the surprise of Lafitte, Leo returned, after having bidden him adieu until the morrow.

"Anything wrong, my son?" asked the chief in his quiet way.

"There may be, sir, and I returned to have a talk with you, so as to prevent wrong if possible."

"What is it, Leo?"

"Are you able to walk a short distance, if much depended upon it, sir?"

"Yes, I am stronger, I guess, than I have led you to believe, for those quarters have been so pleasant here, and the attractions so agreeable. I have lingered longer than there was need for."

"I am glad to hear you say this, father," answered Leo, feeling assured that he had his father's secret that the beautiful nun was the cause of his having remained there, when perhaps able to depart.

"And must I go, Leo?"

"I will tell you, sir, and let you be the judge."

Then Leo told Lafitte just what Mercedes had

told him; but, true to his promise to her, he did not even make known to his father that she had given the warning.

He led him to believe that he had overheard the conversation between the two pirates, as the nun had done.

In fact, if the truth must be told, Mercedes had heard the name of Lafitte spoken and thus had determined to listen, for the manner of Father Felix told her that something was wrong.

A smile of scorn crossed the dark, stern face of Lafitte, as he heard of the determination of the city fathers to arrest him upon the morrow, and place his men in irons.

"I am sure that neither General Jackson nor Governor Claiborne would allow this outrage, were it in their power to prevent it," said Lafitte.

"So I feel regarding them, father."

"But what think you of the fleet that has gone to Barrataria?"

"Ricardo is there."

"Yes, sir; but a large fleet sailed."

"Well, Ricardo should be able to beat off five times his force, Leo."

"And now, father, I have a plan to propose."

"Well, Leo?"

"You are able to walk a short distance?"

"A long one, if necessary."

"It is not necessary, for I can have men at a point near here with a litter to bear you on."

"Well?"

"My intention is to go up the river and get the schooner, and drop down with the current, send a boat to this shore with men to carry you, and let Coola come with you to a point which I will show him."

"It is coming on to storm, I am glad to see, and after the guards are changed at midnight, all will be quiet; and if it rains, the schooner can float down with the current, with all hands ready to set sail if we are discovered."

"And then, my son?"

"We can gain the open sea, run to the stronghold, and if Ricardo has not been captured, we can arrange terms then of surrender, so that there will be no doubt as to your sincerity in giving up piracy and dispersing your crews."

"Leo, my son, you have planned well."

"All I have to say is to carry out your plan, naming your time and place for me to meet you, and I will be there."

"And, father—"

"Yes?"

"You must arrange to get rid of that sweet nun, Sister Mercedes, to-night, by telling her she must not remain on duty, for did you escape she might be suspected by the evil-minded of lending you aid."

"Ever thoughtful, my noble boy. I will do as you say."

"Now I will take Coola with me, father, show him the point where he is to meet me, with you, just half an hour after midnight."

"Then I will take a look at the vessels at anchor in the river, so as to steer clear of them to-night in floating down, and by eleven o'clock the Golden Wings shall be on the other shore awaiting the time to send for you."

"Au revoir, father!"

And with a grasp of the hand Leo departed, beckoning to Coola, the African, to follow him.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFESSION.

WHEN Coola left the pirate chief alone, to accompany Lieutenant Leo, Mercedes glided softly into the room, for she had seen the two depart, and stood not far from the cot upon which Lafitte lay.

"Mercedes, it is kind of you to come to me, and I am glad that you are here, for I have something to tell you," said Lafitte.

She did not move from where she was standing, nor make response.

"Will you come nearer to me, Mercedes?"

She obeyed.

"Sit there, where Leo sits, and listen to me, for this will be the last time we ever meet, unless you will it otherwise."

She started, and her face paled and flushed by turns.

"I am going away, Mercedes?"

"When?"

"To-night."

"So soon?"

"Shall I confess to you that I have been able to go before, but have lingered here, glad to be near you!"

"You must not talk to me thus, Achile."

"It is only for this once; but do you not wish to know where I am going?"

"Yes."

"To sea."

Again she started, and over her face came a look of pain and anxiety commingled.

"Nay, do not fear, for I am done with the black flag of the pirate."

"Thank God!"

"Do you not wish to know why I am going?"

"I know."

"Ah! and who told you?"

"Did not your son tell you that you must go?"

"Yes, do you know this?"

"I told him all I knew, and felt that he would heed my warning."

"You told him?"

"Yes!"

"He led me to believe that he heard it from overhearing the conversation of two priests!"

"Noble boy! he said that to shield me, even from you, for he promised not to betray me."

"Leo is a noble boy, and it was manly in him to thus protect you."

"So you told him all?"

"Yes, as I overheard the conversation of the priests."

"Bless you, Mercedes, for you have doubtless saved me from the gallows."

"No, I do not believe they would dare do that, and yet they might."

"It was with dread of what they might do that I played eavesdropper and heard all."

"Then I told Lieutenant Leo."

"Ever kind, dear Mercedes, and it pains me to say farewell to you to-night, perhaps forever."

"Yes, Achile, forever; but you will remain true to yourself in the future, and no longer be known as Lafitte!"

"I will no longer be Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, Mercedes."

"Thank Heaven for those words. Achile, and you owe it to your noble son to keep them true, for just to think of his growing up to be a—a—"

"A pirate, Mercedes."

"Yes."

"He has known no other life, and yet has hardly known that it was wrong, for ours has been a little island community, a small nation of itself, as it were, and Leo has but little knowledge of the outer world."

"Poor boy! had he only known a mother's care."

"He has told you then?" quickly said Lafitte.

"Only that his mother died in his infancy."

"Would you know more of her, Mercedes?"

"Yes."

The word was hardly audible, but the look on her face showed how anxious she was to know more of the woman who had been Lafitte's wife.

"I will tell you, Mercedes, of she who took the place in my life which belonged to you, and which I had hoped would be yours."

"Do not speak thus to me, Achile."

"You know what I now am."

"Forgive me, sweet nun; but in remembering the by-gone the words would break from my lips."

"I will hear your story, Achile."

"I was little more than a youth, when I fled, as I believed, Cain-accursed from the dear old home, and became a wanderer."

"With what I did I will not tire you; but in a few years I found myself master of a vessel and I went to Africa to enter into the slave trade."

"One voyage was enough for me, as such traffic went against my inmost nature, wicked man though I was."

"I gave up being a slaver, after that voyage, and entered my vessel as a cruiser in a South American country at war with Spain."

"It was privateering, and from that it was but a step to piracy, and after the war ended I boldly placed a black field with golden wings in the center, as my flag."

"One day I sighted a vessel and gave chase."

"It proved to be, I discovered upon my near approach, a craft commanded by a former officer of mine, and signaling him who I was, we ran near each other and I went on board."

"While there I learned from him that he had captured a beautiful maiden, from her father's home upon the coast of Jamaica."

"Her father was a man of vast wealth, and a Spaniard, and the pirate captain, for such he was, boldly told me that he intended to restore the maiden, for an enormous ransom, and then again capture her and force her to be his wife."

"Just then the captive ran out of the cabin, and throwing herself at my feet appealed for my protection."

"He was furious and would have struck her; but I warded off the blow, and with deepest pity for the girl, I told her I should protect her."

"He rushed upon me in a frenzy, but I seized the maiden in my arms, sprung into the sea, and my boat pushed off from alongside and picked us up."

"His crew fired upon me, killing three of my men in the boat and wounding the maiden, but we reached my schooner, my men were already at their guns and a fierce battle was begun between the two vessels."

"He would not yield, and I sunk him, with all on board."

"For weeks the young girl remained on my vessel, suffering from her wound, which was a severe one, and tenderly cared for by me, and an old negress, the mother of Coola, who fortunately was on board."

"Then I took the maiden to her home, and restored her to her father, who believed me to be an officer of the Columbian Navy, as she did."

"Mercedes, I became deeply interested in the young girl, and I felt that she loved me, so I visited her several times at her house."

"Still I did not wish to deceive her, so had not asked her to become my wife."

"One night I was at her house, which was upon the coast, when some officers from the fort rode up and denounced me as Lafitte the pirate."

"I shot my accuser dead, and then sought to retreat, but the others would have fired upon me had she not thrown herself into my arms."

"I saw my opportunity and retreated, with her as my shield."

"I gained my vessel, set sail, and then told her the story of my life."

"She said frankly that she would not desert me, and seeking a South American port, she was made my wife, and she was the mother of Leo, and in giving to me a son, she lost her own life."

"Such is my story, Mercedes, in all its bitterness and truth, and though I loved poor Juaquita, it was not as I loved you, for you are the one woman in the world to me, have ever been, and will ever be."

CHAPTER XX.

TRUE TO HER VOWS.

WITH head bowed, and deepest attention to every word uttered, Mercedes the Nun had listened to the strange story of Lafitte.

She had at last heard who was the mother of Leo, and knew of the woman who had taken her place in the man she had so fondly loved.

She did not wonder that Lafitte had made poor Juaquita Barancos his wife, and was glad to see that he had dealt honorably with her.

When he had ceased speaking she said softly:

"I thank you, Achile."

"I am glad to have told you all, Mercedes."

"And her father, Achile?"

"You mean the father of Juaquita?"

"Yes."

"He still lives."

"At his old home?"

"Yes."

"Has he no other children?"

"None."

"Poor man."

"Yes, he has suffered much."

"Did he ever know the fate of his daughter?"

"Yes, we landed on the coast one night, and she went to her home and told her father all."

"And he forgave her?"

"Partially, yet cared not to see her again."

"Does he know that she is dead?"

"Yes, for I told him, and his sorrow was great, for he loved her devotedly, and he regretted that he had not asked her to come back to his home, even though she was the wife of Lafitte the Pirate," and the chief always spoke bitterly when he referred to himself.

"Does he know that she has a son?"

"Yes, and wished to take him, but I wished the boy with me."

"And Leo?"

"Knows nothing of his grandfather; but if aught happens to me, Coola knows all and can tell him."

"It had been better had you allowed him to go to his grandfather?"

"Perhaps so; but I was selfish, and loving him as I did, kept him with me, and his presence has kept many a sin from my door, while he has been as a shield and a safeguard to me."

"But, Achile, how became it known to the officers that you were Lafitte?"

"Mercedes, there is something more to tell."

"Yes, Achile?"

"Do you know aught of my brother?"

"Very little."

"You did not marry him, as I had supposed, until I knew that he was unmarried."

"Ah no, for my act had made you a wanderer, and loving you, I could never marry Henri, and hence I am here, a nun."

"My brother obtained a berth in the navy of the United States."

"So I heard, Achile, and rose rapidly in rank."

"Yes, and while he was cruising in his vessel in the West Indies, he met Juaquita Barancos at a ball one night."

"He loved her, offered himself soon after, and her father accepted, though she did not care particularly for him."

"Still they were engaged, when she was captured by the pirate, from whom I rescued her."

"I knew nothing of this, or her lover, until the night I was denounced at her father's house."

"It seems that Henri had been on the track of my vessel, little dreaming that Lafitte was his brother."

"He had followed me to the coast, and entering port had discovered that a vessel answering to the description of mine, was then lying hidden on the coast, and her commander visiting at the Barancos villa."

"In company with some officers he had ridden thither, and, at a venture, had denounced me as Lafitte."

"I had leveled my pistol at him, when suddenly I recognized him."

"And just in the instant of time did I do so, and turning my pistol, as I drew trigger, it killed the man standing by his side."

"Oh Achile! some kind Providence still holds you in guidance, even though you be Lafitte."

"It would seem so, Mercedes, to again prevent me from taking my brother's life, and to bring me once more into your presence."

"Sh—Achile; but what of your brother?"

"I knew not, until long after Juaquita was my wife, that Henri was her lover."

"Had I known it, I would never have wedded her."

"But he, feeling that Lafitte had robbed him of his bride, and not recognizing me, has proven my bitterest foe."

"Often have I fled from his vessel, for never would I tire upon him."

"Poor Henri has also had a sad lot in life."

"Yes, twice robbed of a bride, and twice almost slain by his brother."

"And where is he now, Achile?"

"He was in New Orleans the day of the battle."

"Indeed! I heard not of his vessel being here."

"Mercedes," and the voice of Lafitte was low and earnest as he spoke the name.

"Yes, Achile."

"This wound in my side was not received in battle."

"Achile!"

"It is true."

"What do you mean, Achile?"

"The battle had almost ended, when a boat rowed along under the river-bank."

"From that boat, which landed at my battery, an officer sprung out."

"He evidently well knew where Lafitte and his pirate crew were stationed."

"He beheld me, leveled his pistol and fired."

"Seeing me fall, he had done his deadly work, as he believed, and retreated."

"My men would have shot him down or given pursuit, but I would not allow it, as he who had fired upon me was simply avenging his lost Juaquita—he was my brother Henri, Mercedes!"

"An assassin?" and her lips curled with scorn.

"No, Mercedes, for he took desperate chances to kill me."

"He was an avenger; but he failed."

"Ah, Achile, how strange has all happened with you."

"Strange, indeed, Mercedes, and strangest of all is the fact that I find you here, a nun."

"You have taken the vail, Mercedes; but you did it believing all that you loved forever lost to you."

"Now I have come back, and though I am branded as a pirate, and hated by mankind, my late conduct has shown that I am anxious to atone for the past, to live a different life, a better one."

"In your love I can become everything you would wish."

"So, Mercedes, I would urge you to withdraw from the Church, lay aside the sacred vail you wear, and go with me and Leo to some far land, if you care not to live in America, and let our last days at least be happy."

"Happy! do you speak of happiness, Achile Latour, with your hands crimsoned with the blood of your fellow beings, and crime-stains

upon your heart that the tears of angels can never wash out?

"No, no! do not tempt me, Achile, because you know that I love you still."

"Yes, I confess my weakness, I confess that I am human, and that you have lifted me out of the grave as it were."

"But no, Achile, I am not going to yield, I will thrust from me the cup of happiness you hold to my burning lips, I will not be tempted to break my sacred vows."

"I have already sinned in loving you, and confessing it; but now I will be strong, be once again Mercedes, the nun."

"Farewell, Achile, a last farewell." She bent over him quickly, kissed him once, twice, thrice, upon his lips, and throwing off his grasp as he would have held her, fled from the room to seek her dismal cell, where in bitter humiliation she prayed to become once more Mercedes the Nun.

CHAPTER XXI.

BITERS BITTEN.

WHEN Leo departed from the convent he went with Coola to a spot not far distant, where he had observed a grove of live-oak trees.

It was an unfrequented place, he had noticed, in going to and fro, and about half-way between the convent and a point upon the river where he had seldom seen any one, or even a boat, land.

"Give me a row upon the river, Coola, now that you know where you are to come with the chief," said Leo.

The slave nodded, as was his wont, and they went toward the river, where a boat was hired, and the two went out upon the waters, Leo directing its course and Coola at the oars.

Coola's long, powerful arms fairly made the boat fly, and he had been so puffed up with nursing Lafitte that he was glad to get a chance to exercise.

Going down the river on the course which the schooner must take, Leo marked the anchorage of every craft, and felt that, if the night was dark, they might float by the city and vessels unseen.

"Anyhow, it is our only chance, and if we have to take the fire of the forts, so let it be," he said, in his quiet way, which showed his utter disregard of fear.

Returning over the same course, Leo paid the man for his boat, gave a few instructions to Coola, and went on foot up the river to a point where he had left his own skiff, a light affair which he had purchased to row to and from the city and schooner in.

It was night as he reached the skiff, and he was glad to see that a slowly falling rain was coming on, and that the skies were heavy with clouds.

"This is good, for it will rain all night, and the darkness will be in our favor," he thought, as he seated himself in the skiff and seized the oars.

He had gone but a short way, when his quick ear detected the sound of oars.

Instantly he ceased rowing, and listened.

He distinctly caught the quick sound of oars, and they were coming up the river after him.

Lafitte knew his power, and that he could send a boat along with a speed of any man he had ever met, and that he could keep ahead of whoever was coming he did not doubt.

But somehow he felt that he should know what it meant—this boat coming up the river after him.

The schooner lay some miles above, and perhaps it was bound to her.

No boat from the vessel he knew would have left, unless in search of him, for his orders were firm in this regard, and upon such a night no one would be rowing for pleasure.

It might be from one of the up-river plantations, and yet seldom was it that such boats were so late out upon the river.

With a curiosity to know if it was himself, or the schooner, that caused the occupants of the boat to be rowing so swiftly up the river in the now rapidly falling rain, he rested upon his oars, merely keeping his skiff from floating back with the current.

Soon he beheld a dark object come in sight, and his keen eyes detected that there were two occupants in it.

Both of the men were at the oars, and pulling rapidly.

With their backs to him, of course he was not seen by them, and they were soon close upon him.

"If the thing works, mate, we'll make a good haul, and I hopes it will," Leo heard one say.

He gave his oars a stronger tug, and kept ahead of the boat, for he wished to hear more.

"Oh, it'll work, for the boy's his son, and if you tell yer leetle story straight, how the chief has been arrested and it will take a few thousands to git him out, the lad will pocket the money and come back with us, never fear, and we can just drop him overboard and take the chink."

"I hope so; but it's a beastly night."

"Our only chance, for to morrow Lafitte is to be arrested, as I heard from good authority."

"Well, just give it to me again what I'm to do?"

"You are to say you want to see the young skipper, Lieutenant Leo, and tell him that the chief, his father, has been nabbed and will be taken to the lockup; but you think he can be freed for a couple of thousand given the guard before they get to the *carcel* with him."

"Tell him to come with us, and we'll put him onto the working of the case."

"I am here now, gentlemen, and you are my game," and Lieutenant Leo sent his skiff quickly alongside of the boat, which he grasped with one hand, while he covered the two plotters with a pistol held in the other.

The men were amazed beyond all instant resistance.

To behold the one against whom they had plotted, to suddenly confront them upon the dark waters, and with the chances of a surprise in their favor, completely took them aback and looked like the workings of the supernatural.

They had frequently heard Lafitte called a wizard, and common rumor had it that he was allied to Satan, and in those days superstition held full sway.

When therefore the one against whom they had formed a bungling plot to get gold, suddenly appeared before them, they were completely upset, and Leo was master of the situation.

"You wish to see me, senors?" he said, for Leo often used the *senor* in place of sir, as he did also monsieur, for raised as he had been on a vessel where there were a dozen nationalities represented, he had learned to speak well half a dozen languages.

Seeing the cool manner of the youth, the men were thrown off their guard, and one of them, just gathering his wits, said:

"Yes, sir, we were going to the schooner, to see you, if it be as you are Lieutenant Leo."

"I am, and hearing my name, I ran you aboard, taking you somewhat by surprise."

"But what is your business with me, senors?"

They were now sure that Leo had not heard enough to condemn them, and hardly remembered just what he had heard.

Supposing him to have been running along ahead of them, they did not suppose he had caught aught that was against them.

So the spokesman said quickly:

"You see, sir, the guards are to arrest the chief, Lafitte, to-night, at midnight, and we are soldiers from the Governor's mansion, and heard about it, and concluded to come and let you know."

"Them as goes to arrest him at the convent is a sergeant and four men, and they will carry a litter on which to bear him to the *carcel*; but we know they can be bought off, and not wishing to see the captain taken, concluded to tell you so you could get there and buy the sergeant off, which can be done with a couple of thousands, sir."

"This is a strange story you tell me, men, for I certainly thought Commodore Lafitte was under the protection of the Governor."

"Yes, sir; but the people says he's a pirate, and should hang, and so they are going to put him under guard, to protect him, they say at headquarters; but that means hanging."

"Well, I would pay a large sum to free Commodore Lafitte, and reward you liberally, if your story is true; but I have not the money with me, so you will have to go on to the schooner, and we will come back down the river together."

The two villains bit at the bait, and resuming their oars turned up the river, Leo keeping just ahead of them, so that he had them before his face.

As they neared the lonely anchorage where the schooner was lying, a voice hailed:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, Rafael," answered Leo, and as the two boats ran alongside, he told the two men to come on board.

They obeyed, for they could do nothing else, but somehow they began to regret their coming, and their fears were realized when Leo said.

"Senor Rafael, put those two men in double irons and send them below."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the young officer, and

the two plotters groaned in agony of spirit at the failure of their game for gold, and the prospect of the yard-arm before them, for they now felt sure that Leo had overheard their plot and had cleverly captured them.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

WHEN Lieutenant Leo had arranged regarding the two men, whom he had so cleverly caught in the net, which they were setting for him, he called Rafael into the cabin with him.

Rafael had a vessel of his own, or had had, before the destruction of Lafitte's stronghold by the American flotilla; but, feeling that he could depend upon him the chief had, as has been seen, brought him with him on the volunteer expedition to aid in the defense of New Orleans.

Captain Rafael therefore was acting as first officer of the schooner, and yet all ranks bowed to Leo, as he was, though called lieutenant, considered as second in command to Lafitte himself.

It was also well known that should aught befall Lafitte, Leo was to be chief in his stead.

Upon his father's schooner Leo acted when at sea, as an officer, ranking next to the chief, and at other times as aide to Lafitte, so that his word was law.

So therefore, though Rafael was nominally in command, in the absence of the chief, he yielded readily to the young lieutenant.

"Senor Rafael, there is trouble afoot," said Leo, when the two were in the cabin together.

"I hope nothing that cannot be mastered, Senor Leo?"

"I think not; but the truth is, now that the fight has been won, the people forget the services of our chief, and ourselves, and clamor loudly for the Governor to put Lafitte under arrest, and to seize the schooner, throw the men in irons, and thus leave matters until the President is heard from."

"This looks bad, senor."

"It looks worse from the fact that neither General Jackson nor Governor Claiborne, could pledge a pardon to the chief and his men, for our services, and yet did all in their power for us.

"The letters they sent on, asking it, with the report of the battle, were unnoticed in the return official papers, and this looks a little dubious.

"Governor Claiborne, I know, has just dispatched a special officer with full particulars, but it will be weeks before aught can be heard from him, and in the mean time the clamor has been so great that Lafitte and his men should be held prisoners, pending word from the President, that it has been decided to make the arrest and seizure to-morrow.

"The soldiers at the headquarters even knew this, for the two just sent below in irons, were playing a game upon their knowledge of how matters stood, to get me into their house and rob me of some thousands.

"I have them safe, however, and, when we pass the city, shall set them free, with a letter to the Governor, explaining my departure."

"Then you do not intend to submit to arrest, Senor Leo?"

"Do you think I am of a nature to submit, Rafael, while there is a chance for fight?"

"I don't think you are," and Rafael laughed.

"Now, I got this information in a direct way, and my plan is to let the schooner drop down the river with the current, until she reaches a point where we can make fast to a tree on the other shore.

"Then I wish a boat and six good men, and they must carry a litter, for we go for the chief."

"Good! bravo!"

"When he is safe on board we will float past the city, and try to avoid discovery; but, if discovered, we will have the men with sails and halyards in hand, ready to spread our canvas, and must run the gantlet, and, without firing a shot, for we must do nothing, Rafael, to damage our cause in the eyes of the nation's head."

"True, sir; but when do you start?"

"Within the hour, to go to the place where we tie up, for I must search the rendezvous, where Coola is to bring Commodore Lafitte soon after midnight."

"I will at once have all in readiness, Senor Leo," and Rafael went on deck.

It was a dismal night indeed, and the rain came patterning down heavily, while the wind moaned through the rigging.

In half an hour the schooner was all ready, the anchor was up, and she swept away on the current.

Leo having familiarized himself with the river, during the past few weeks, took the helm, and guided the craft on her course as she went

along with the swiftly flowing current of the Mississippi.

Here and there a light came in view, from some plantation home, and over the bend a glow in the sky showed where the town lay, its street lamps reflected against the murky clouds.

Toward the further shore the schooner swept, and, as she neared the town, almost grazed the trees overhanging the river.

At length Leo gave orders for the headway to be checked, and as the schooner swept against the foliage, half a hundred hands grasped the branches.

Some snapped off, others bent, but at last the headway ceased, and the schooner was held fast against the sweeping branches of the trees that spread far over the waters.

Below and beyond was the town, and a boat was launched and headed toward it.

The oars were muffled, and the experienced oarsmen rowed without a splash.

Only the sweep of the river, the murmur of the current as it were, and the patter of the rain could be heard.

The city seemed asleep, only now and then the rumble of wheels and the bark of some dog, aroused from his slumbers, being heard.

Toward the city shore Leo headed the boat, landing at the point he wished, and there remained quiet.

The heavy tread of soldiers reached his ears, and peeping over the bank he saw a squad on its rounds of relief.

He knew that it was midnight, and that they were relieving the guard.

"In half an hour more I will venture," he said.

And all remained as silent and patient as Indians, while waiting.

"Come, lads!"

At the whispered command, four men stepped from the boat after Leo.

They carried a canvas litter with them, and climbed up the steep bank, slippery with the falling rain.

Two of the men remained in the boat.

"If discovered, say that you are from the British prize brig, awaiting an officer who is visiting his lady-love," said Leo.

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded the coxswain, who remained in the boat.

Then Leo moved off with the four men, and wended their way toward the grove.

They passed several stragglers, who eyed them curiously, and supposed them to be a relief guard upon its rounds.

At last the grove was reached, and most dismally did the rain drop among the trees.

"Coola!"

Leo said the word in a whisper, loud and shrill enough to penetrate some distance.

"Coola here, massa!"

The slave stepped forward as he spoke.

"Good, Coola! And the chief?"

"Yonder, massa. Not sart'in you was cur folks."

"Think maybe you sogers."

Leo stepped forward as the African spoke, and beheld Lafitte leaning against a tree and enveloped in heavy wraps.

"Ah, Leo, I half-thought you and your men were a relief guard or search-party, you marched with such precision."

"Yes, father, we wished so to be considered."

"But, come, let the men bear you on the litter."

"I must, for I am not as strong as I thought."

The litter was stretched, Lafitte lay down upon it, a heavy dark canvas was spread over him and the party moved out of the grove at a slow step.

Leo led the way, and Coola followed, and all had their weapons ready for instant use, should they be halted, and forced to use them.

One or two persons were met, who gazed curiously at the little party, and an officer on horseback drew up and asked sternly:

"Who are you?"

"An officer wounded in a duel, sir, being borne to his vessel, the British prize," replied Leo, calmly.

"Who is he?"

"Lieutenant Beverly," replied Leo, promptly, remembering that an officer of that name was one of those who had been placed in charge of the prize brig Fearnought.

"Ah! that is too bad, for I know Beverly slightly."

"Have you reported the affair to the general?"

"I shall make my report, sir, early in the morning," was the reply, and Leo saluted politely and followed on after his men, who had not halted.

And the officer rode on his way, little dreaming in what deadly danger he was had he interfered in the march of the little party, for Coola stood near Leo, and, with the bound of a tiger, would have been upon him at the slightest signal of his young master, for the African was possessed of powers strangely like a wild beast, and those on board of the schooner, or at the island, who had witnessed his springing upon a foe, never cared to anger him.

But Leo's coolness saved them, for the officer was one in authority on his rounds, and hastening on, he overtook the party near the riverbank.

"You did well, Leo," said Lafitte from beneath his canvas covering.

They now reached the boat, and the chief was placed in the stern, all enveloped in canvas so that he was wholly protected from the rain.

The oarsmen seized the oars, and the boat shot silently away on its course.

The night was intensely dark, and the rain now fell in torrents; but that was in their favor, and in half an hour they were on board the schooner.

Then the ropes were let go, which held the schooner alongside the trees, the chief was borne into the cabin, where Coola soon made him comfortable, and the Destiny started on her way down the river, floating with the current, her crew ready to hoist sail at the slightest command, and Leo at the helm.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THROUGH the rain, and in the intense darkness, only here and there could a light from the town be seen, and several times the schooner was almost upon the vessel at anchor before she was discovered.

But the watch was looking after Number One, by taking shelter from the rain, rather than keeping a lookout for an escaping pirate craft, and the schooner swept by unseen.

At length a light flashed dead ahead, and Leo felt that those on that vessel were awake, and would see them.

So he boldly hailed:

"Vessel ahoy!"

In the darkness he could not tell whether it was a ship, brig or barque, though he could dimly see her yards.

"Ahoy! who hails?" came the response.

"I am adrift, sir, and would like to throw a line as I pass and make fast to you until morning."

"Ay ay, but don't run us aboard!"

"No, sir."

A quick order was given to throw a line, and it was caught by the sea men on the vessel, which was now seen to be a brig.

The schooner, skillfully guided, swept by, and rounded to upon feeling the pull of the rope.

The line became taut and the schooner lay nearly a length astern of the brig and below her.

"What schooner is that?" cried a voice on the brig.

"The Vesta, sir; we were repairing ship and had our anchors ashore, for we were fast to the pier above," replied Leo, remembering that a schooner of that name was repairing above.

"Ay ay," came the response from the brig and then all was quiet on board.

"Senor Rafael?"

"Well, Lieutenant Leo?"

"Do you know that brig?"

"Yes, senor."

"It is the Fearnought."

"Yes."

"We made a narrow escape, senor."

"Yes, sir, and your coolness saved us."

"It was a lucky thought of yours to haul."

"I knew we would be discovered, so decided to act boldly."

"And you did."

"Now let us lie here for awhile, then quietly let the rope out to the end and let go, and perhaps they won't notice us drift quietly away."

"I hope not, senor."

"If they do, we must set sail and run for it, and in this darkness the forts can only hit us by accident."

"Now I will go into the cabin for awhile."

So saying, Leo entered the cabin.

All was darkness there, for there was not a light on board; but Coola hastily put screens over the stern port and skylight, and lighted a lamp.

"You had a narrow escape, Leo, for I heard what was said."

"Yes, father; but we are all right now, I think, and Rafael will soon let go from the brig."

"It is the Fearnought, doubtless, for no merchant craft would have been on the alert."

"It is the Fearnought, sir, and she is in trim for following us, if we are suspected."

"But, father, I captured two soldiers to-night, who were playing a little game against me."

"They are from the Governor's guard, and I have them on board in irons; but think it a good idea to write a letter to the Governor, explaining why you take flight, and return it by these men, who can tell what story they please about our capturing them."

"Do so, Leo, and I will sign it, if you wish."

Calling to Coola to bring him a quill and an ink-horn, Leo wrote as follows:

ON BOARD SCHOONER DESTINY,
OFF NEW ORLEANS.
Midnight

To HIS EXCELLENCE, GOVERNOR CLAIBORNE:

RESPECTED SIR:—Learning from a reliable source that, notwithstanding your efforts to protect me, that I was to be arrested to-morrow at the convent, where I lay wounded, and thrown into the *carcero*, and that my vessel was to also be seized, and my officers and crew placed in irons, I determined to submit to no such treatment from the hands of those who seek my life.

Hence I made my escape to-night from the convent, was brought on my schooner, and am now on my way to sea.

I shall go to my stronghold to see if it is true that an expedition has been sent to destroy it, while I was acting in good faith with you, and if so, I can do nothing further in that respect; but should the stronghold remain as I left it, I shall disband my men, and hold the fleet subject to your orders, excepting such small craft as I will give the crews to make their escape in.

By sending a vessel-of-war to the island you will thus receive the fleet and what booty is there; but, as to myself, and my craft, I shall remain at sea under no flag, until I receive word whether a pardon has been granted me and those with me.

If such is done, I shall return to New Orleans and surrender my craft to you.

If no pardon is given us, I will not again sail under the sable flag with its golden wings, but will offer my vessel and services to a South American country now willing to accept aid from outside sources.

A communication addressed to Senor Leo, San Barbara Inn, Vera Cruz, Mexico, will reach me.

I send this communication to your Excellency by two of your guard whom I picked up.

I have the honor to be your Excellency's obedient servant,

LAFITTE."

This letter Lafitte signed, the two men were called to the cabin and to one of them it was given, with a handsome gold souvenir for both, and instructions to deliver it to the Governor's own hand, and tell what story they wished as to their capture.

The schooner had meanwhile been let go from the brig, unnoticed by those on the latter vessel, and was silently drifting down the river.

The two men got into their boat alongside, when the famous scene of battle, a few weeks before, had been passed, and were told to pull back to the town, which they were glad to do, rejoiced at their escape, where they had expected to be swung up to the yard-arm.

Then sail was set upon the schooner, and feeling the breeze she went flying along through the darkness on her course to the Gulf.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BOATSWAIN'S STORY.

DAWN broke and found the schooner far down the river, on its flight to the Gulf, and yet the rain continued, causing the day to appear as gloomy as the night had been, almost.

Lafitte little feared pursuit, and certainly not capture, for the Destiny had never yet been beaten in a chase, no matter what had been matched against her, and blow it light or strong.

Running out of the Delta in the afternoon, the sails were trimmed flat, and with the wind on the starboard quarter she was headed for Barrataria Bay.

The rain still continued, and the wind being light, it was the next evening before she ran into the harbor of the island where long had dwelt the Buccaneers of Barrataria.

A glance was sufficient to show all on board that the story was only too true, that a foe had indeed been there.

Lafitte came on deck, supported by Coola, as the schooner dropped anchor, and gazed at the scene of destruction.

Ruin was upon every side, the cabins had been buried, debris was scattered about, boats with their bottoms knocked in strewed the beach, the guns in the forts had been removed, or the carriages turned under them, and desolation was upon all.

The face of the pirate chief was stern indeed, as he gazed upon the scene, and from his lips broke the bitter words:

Lafitte the Pirate has kept his word; but honorable men have proved treacherous.

"So let it be, I have decided as to my course, and I shall still keep faith in my new resolve.

"I am no longer Lafitte the Pirate."

Lafitte had gone ashore, but the scene was a sad one to him.

He had known no other home except the deck of his vessel, and there in boyhood he had played, swam, fished, hunted and enjoyed life, for he was innocent of wrong-doing.

Loving him as he did, his pirate father had never taught him how evil was the life they led.

After a walk over the island with Rafael, they were about to return to the vessel, when suddenly they beheld a sailor come out of a thicket and advance toward them.

"Ha! here is a chance to know all, for that is Spalding of Ricardo's schooner," said Leo.

The man soon advanced, and his face was pale and haggard.

He greeted the two young officers with evident delight, and his story was soon told.

He had fled in the night and hidden in the thicket, and when he saw the fleet sail away, had come out of his hiding-place.

Ruin on all sides greeted him, and the graves of his shipmates were upon every hand.

He had found some food, and thus he had subsisted, hoping for the return of Lafitte, whom he did not know had gone to New Orleans, and felt sure would come back ere long.

Then he told of Ricardo's drunkenness, the orgie of all but a few on the island, and how, thus surprised, the Buccaneers of Barrataria had been wiped out.

"And Americans did this, Spalding?" asked Leo.

"Yes, Senor Leo, a fleet flying American colors.

"Had we not been so demoralized we could have beaten them off.

"But they had a good pilot, evidently some traitor from among us, and ran boldly into the harbor before we saw them.

"Then it was too late, and the result is before you, senor."

"And Ricardo?"

"Senor, I am sure that Captain Ricardo and a number of his crew escaped, for I saw from where I first hid, when I knew all was lost, a number of boats run out from the shore to the schooner, which at once sailed away."

"Coward and traitor! he should suffer for this!" said Leo between his teeth.

Then he added:

"Come on board the schooner, Spalding, and make your report to the chief."

"Sail, ho!" suddenly sung out Rafael, who had been gazing seaward.

Instantly Leo turned his glass upon the sail and said:

"It is the brig-of-war Fearnought.

"We must get to sea at once and run for it, Rafael."

They hastened down to the shore, called their boat's crew, who were gazing at the destruction on all sides, and were soon on board the schooner.

"The Fearnought is in the offing, sir, and we will have to run for it; but here is Spalding, boatswain of Ricardo's schooner, and he has much to tell you," and Leo left the man in the cabin with Lafitte, while he went on deck and at once got the Destiny under sail.

She was soon pressing out into the Gulf under clouds of canvas.

As soon as she was discerned from on board the Fearnought, the chase began, and the two vessels went flying away over the blue waters at a great speed, while from the bows of the brig a rapid fire was kept up at the pretty schooner.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SEA DUEL.

THAT Leo had had reason not to dread a chase by the Fearnought was soon proven, as the schooner slipped away from her pursuer in a manner that showed she would soon run out of range.

The Fearnought was a beautiful vessel, had been the pride of the British fleet, and was very fast.

But those on board soon discovered that the fame won by Lafitte's schooner was not exaggerated.

The young commander of the brig had been aroused from his slumbers by the report that the merchant schooner had broken adrift, and he had ordered a boat to go in search, and it had picked up the two men set free by Leo.

They told their story, or one that suited them to tell, about having been caught ashore by La-

fitte's men, and made known that the schooner had escaped, and that they bore a letter to the Governor.

The captain of the Fearnought was not a man to wait for orders when a pirate had put to sea and had two hours' start of him, so sending the men ashore, he got up anchor and started in chase.

He calculated well that Lafitte would at once sail for Barrataria, and thither he headed to see the schooner flying out of the harbor under full sail as he drew near.

He sent several shot through her sails, and killed and wounded several of the crew by his fire; but the schooner was unharmed materially, and went flying away from him at a speed that was surprising.

When night fell the Destiny was well down ahead, and the captain of the Fearnought felt that Lafitte had escaped him, so put back to port, for he was not in the best trim to meet an English cruiser, being short in his crew.

In the mean time Lafitte had headed along the Gulf Stream toward Vera Cruz.

He had held a long conversation with Leo and Senor Rafael, the result of which was that he decided to hunt down Ricardo, capture him, and deliver him and his vessel up to Governor Claiborne for his treachery, for he could look upon his conduct in no other way.

So the Destiny was put on a course where it was believed she would be most likely to fall in with the schooner of Ricardo.

Once at sea Lafitte recovered rapidly, and in a few days was able to be on deck.

His face had become sad, rather than stern, for the memory was ever before him of a lost love, poor Mercedes, dwelling in convent walls, where he knew that she loved him as he did her, and yet was true to her vows to Heaven.

The thought also that he was doing right was a pleasant one to him, and he began to feel ambitious hopes for the fortune of war.

Seated upon deck one afternoon, these thoughts were busy in his brain, when the lookout aloft shouted:

"Sail, ho!"

"I see her," said Lafitte.

"It is a schooner, just coming out from behind yonder headland."

"And it is the Firebug," said Leo.

"You are right, it is Ricardo's schooner."

"Be ready to signal him!"

The strange schooner, upon sighting the Destiny, had at once headed toward her.

Ricardo recognized this flagship of the Barratarian Buccaneers, and feeling that Lafitte had not gone to the island, so knew nothing of the work there, he headed for him, to tell his own story.

Then Ricardo meant to go upon a piratical cruise to suit himself, and no longer be under a master.

But, as the schooners drew near Ricardo was surprised to read the secret signals set by the Destiny as being most threatening to him.

They read as follows:

"Ricardo, you have proven yourself a traitor, and upon you lies the destruction of the Barratarians and their stronghold."

"The band is broken, but Lafitte still lives, and he will punish you, so prepare to defend your ship."

Ricardo was startled. He knew well that Lafitte's vessel was his equal in all particulars, and perhaps stronger, and he knew too that the chief would face any odds, and often be the victor when a hope was most forlorn.

He did not seek hard knocks and iron, for he wished booty and gold, and so, knowing that he alone read the signals, he called out to his crew that Lafitte's schooner was in the hands of the Americans, and had demanded his surrender.

"We will make a running fight of it, lads, and beat them off," he said.

So the Firebug was crowded with sail and started in flight.

Ricardo knew that in sailing the two schooners were rather evenly matched, with the chances in favor of the Destiny.

But he had heavy stern guns and hoped to cripple his pursuer.

The Destiny at once gave chase, and the roar of the bow-guns of the other was incessant.

Steadily the Destiny gained, though slowly, and it was seen by Ricardo that he would have to fight it out to the bitter end.

The fire of both schooners was severe, and yet that of the Destiny was more serious, as Ricardo and Leo were acting as gunners.

Nearer and nearer the Destiny crept to the Firebug, and both of the beautiful vessels were crowded with canvas, presenting a grand sight in their flying combat.

Thus the hours passed and evening was near at hand, and but a mile divided them.

The Destiny had suffered in hull, rig and crew, and yet the Firebug had been dealt with more severely.

Along the coast they went, not half a mile away, at times, from jutting headlands, and with the wind sending them along at an eight-knot pace.

Just as Ricardo began to feel that the end was not far away, suddenly a sail shot into view.

She ran out from under shelter of a headland, and was so headed as to pass between the two schooners.

A glance showed her to be a large brig-of-war, and, as she sent a broadside at the Firebug, which had the black flag flying, she ran up the British ensign.

The fire of the British brig did little damage to the Firebug, and then she turned her attention to the Destiny, heading so as to cut her off, and at the same time opening a hot fire upon her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FATE OF LAFITTE.

The brig had run out too close upon the Destiny for her daring commander to attempt to escape.

He saw that either Ricardo or himself could do so, and a moment after told him which it would be.

Ricardo held on, and the British cruiser headed for the Destiny.

Had she been an American Lafitte would have hoisted a white flag, for he had no colors flying, and surrendered, taking his chances, when it was seen that he had been chasing one of his own vessels to capture her, as a proof of his continued good faith.

But the stranger he now recognized as the British brig-of-war Vulture, under Captain Grayson, and the same vessel which had come to the island bearing Lord Lennox with the offers made to him by the English commanders.

"We need expect no mercy from him, Leo, after my refusal, and so we must fight it out," calmly said Lafitte.

"You think he will know the schooner as yours, sir?"

"You said that you saw among those on the Vulture, a man who was their pilot, and who had deserted from us?"

"Yes, sir."

"He will know this schooner, if he is still there, and we are his game, as you see, for he pays no attention to Ricardo."

This was true, for the Vulture now bore down upon the Destiny.

Lafitte had no intention of surrendering because he fought against great odds, for his schooner was no match for the brig, and, after her running duel with the Firebug much less so.

Capture by the British meant the yard-arm for him and his men, and so he determined to fight to the bitter end.

"This will be the end, Leo," he said, with a sad smile.

"I fear so, sir; but man has but once to die, and why not now, as well as to-morrow, or in the future?" was the cool response of the daring youth.

"You will not strike, sir?" said Rafael, coming aft.

"No, Senor Rafael.

"Lead and iron are better means of death than hemp," was the significant reply, and the fearless young Spaniard laughed lightly and responded:

"You are right, senor, and the crew are of your opinion.

"We may go down, but the Englishman will suffer before we do."

Such was the spirit that animated all on board the schooner, and the men took their places with the look upon their faces that showed they meant to die there.

Lafitte had donned his full uniform, and buckled on his sword and pistols, and he looked grand and defiant as he stood facing the ordeal, while Leo, as was his wont, showed an utter indifference to his danger.

The brig was now close at hand, and luffing, sent a broadside into the schooner.

Instantly the Destiny's guns belched forth and the fight began fiercely, just as the sun sunk from sight.

Nearer and nearer came the two vessels to each other, firing broadsides, with a lull between.

Then came a loud hail from the Englishman:

"Ho, that schooner!"

"Ahoy, the Vulture!" responded Lafitte in his splendid voice.

"Are you the pirate, Lafitte?"

"I am Lafitte, and at your service, Sir Englishman."

"You fear to show your black flag, knowing that the gallows awaits you."

"You lie, Sir Englishman! Up with the golden wings and the black field!" came the ringing command, and the eyes of Lafitte fairly blazed as he uttered the words.

The ominous ensign was raised by Leo, and Lafitte said in a low tone:

"I had thought never to raise that flag again, Leo; but they shall not defy me."

"We will die as we live, for we are but fugitives."

Then the spirit of their daring leader seemed to seize upon the men, and the guns of the schooner flashed fast and furious.

The brig bore down, pouring in a terrific fire, as though to board; but Leo took the helm of the Destiny, and the more nimble sailing of the schooner prevented the Englishman from running alongside.

Far off, still flying, Ricardo saw the fierce battle, and in his heart was admiration for his gallant chief, and he recognized, fighting the Englishman as Lafitte did, how quickly a combat would have ended between the Destiny and the Firebug.

For a moment the impulse was in the heart of Ricardo to return and aid his chief, and had he done so, fighting with half the desperation that Lafitte did, the Vulture would certainly have fallen a prey to the two schooners, and the Buccaneers of Barrataria would have found pardon awaiting them from the President of the United States.

But Ricardo was selfish, and he looked to carry out his own aims, and so sailed away, while through the darkness came to him the flashes of the guns, and he saw that the schooner was still at bay, still struggling against a powerful foe.

And, stern as death itself Lafitte stood upon his deck, commanding his crew, who obeyed his every word, while Leo held the helm, managing the schooner with a skill that put the brig-of-war at fault time and again, when she sought to board her desperate adversary.

For an hour and more the fierce combat waged.

The schooner was riddled with shot, several of her guns were dismounted and her scuppers ran red, while dead and wounded obstructed the deck.

Rafael lay against the starboard bulwark, a ghastly wound in his side, yet fearless and defiant.

And the brig too had suffered, for her sails were torn, her rigging cut, her guns lying useless upon the deck, and many a dead and dying man lying in a heap.

But Captain Grayson was fearless and merciless now.

He would not forgive Lafitte, and the knowledge that he had fought against them at New Orleans rankled in his heart.

He would still keep up the fight, for his British heart of oak would never strike to an inferior foe, and that foe a pirate.

But our place is on the weaker vessel, and there the scene of carnage is as sickening as the splendid pluck of the crew of the schooner is grand.

On, on waged the battle, and still the Destiny minded the touch of the gallant Leo, still avoided the boarding of the brig, which could throw numbers enough on board, once she got alongside, to overwhelm Lafitte and his men.

The schooner was now terribly cut up, her bulwarks were stove in, her hull was riddled and the water was pouring into her hold, causing her to settle fast.

Soon she began to mind her tiller badly, and yet the brig dared not board now, for she reeled fearfully and threatened to go down at any instant.

"Ho the schooner!" suddenly came the hail, for Captain Grayson's heart was touched by the magnificent courage he beheld.

"Ahoy the Vulture!" was the stern response of Lafitte, who was bleeding from several wounds, and clung to the wheel by Leo for support.

"Do you surrender, Lafitte?"

"No!"

"The struggle is useless."

"Lafitte will die, but never surrender," came the words in trumpet tones.

Then the temporary lull was broken by the roar of the guns and shouts of the combatants once more.

A moment more arose the cry:

"The schooner is going down!"

"Stand to your guns, Barratarians!" shouted Lafitte, and the obedient crew, under the spell of their brave leader, at once obeyed.

"Fight your guns!" next came the order, and, as the water surged into the muzzles the cannon were discharged.

"The end has come! Leo, farewell!"

They were the last words of Lafitte, for the waters swept over the decks of the schooner, her bow plunged beneath the waves, and with a mighty plunge she sank from sight forever into the blue waters of the Mexican Gulf.

Lafitte had kept his word, and the black flag with its golden wings had gone into the depths of the sea.

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